JULY 25¢

FANTASTIC Novels MAGAZINE

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EARTH'S LAST CITADEL

by C. L. MOORE
ND HENRY KUTTNER

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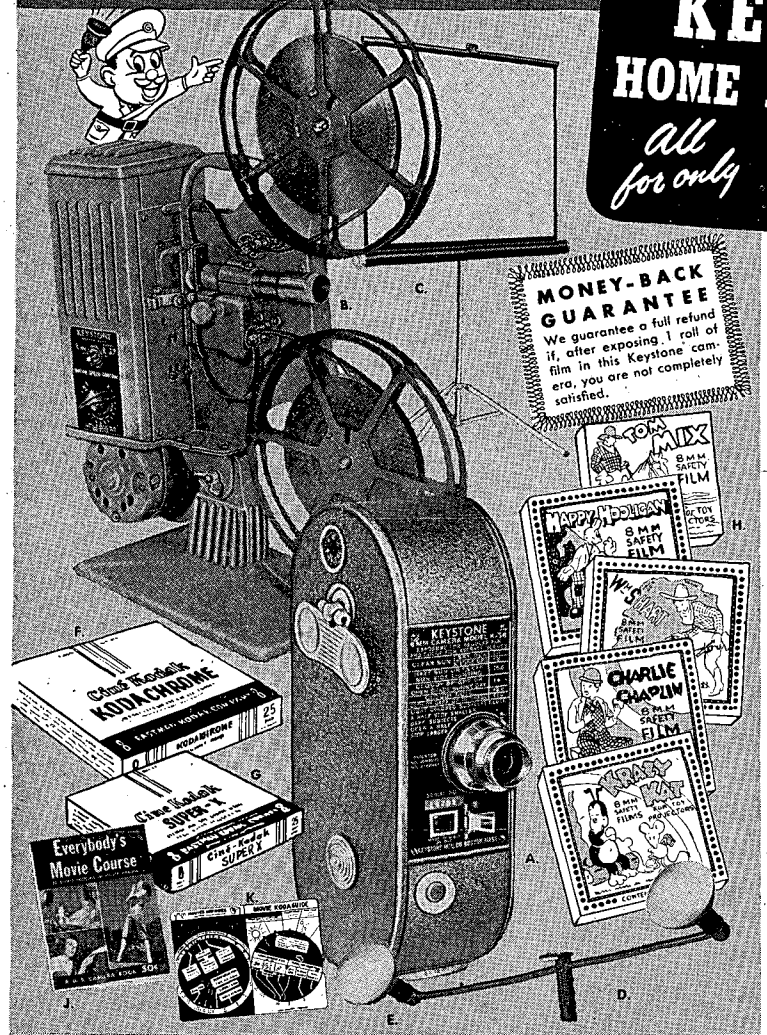

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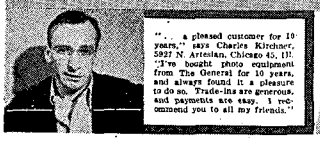

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RAJAH, YOU TOOTHLESS OLD FRAUD! WHAT'S THE IDEA SCARING FOLKS?
HE'S HARMLESS, MISS. GOT AWAY FROM OUR CIRCUS
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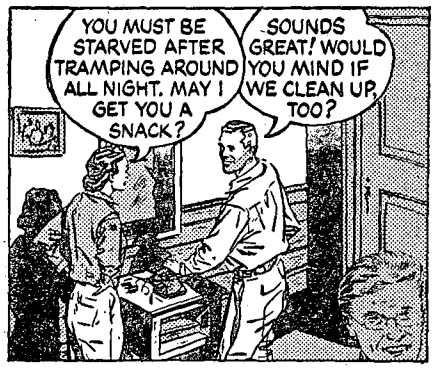

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FANTASTIC Novels MAGAZINE

Vol. 4 JULY, 1950 No. 2

Novel

EARTH'S LAST CITADEL

C. L. Moore and Henry Kuttner 12

At the dying Earth's flaming Source of Power, Alan Drake pitted puny human strength against the all-consuming Alien's irresistible might—in lost mankind's last struggle for survival. . . .

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Novelette and Short Stories

DEATH'S SECRET ..... **J. L. Schoolcraft** 68

What terror could lift the curse if they should disobey an ancient edict made under the stars of Egypt twenty-seven centuries ago?

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THE SOUL TRAP ..... **Charles B. Stilson** 96

He essayed to catch an immortal soul midway in its last escaping flight. . . . And success was his—and horror beyond all dreaming. . . .

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LOST—ONE MYLODON ..... **Elmer Brown Mason** 108

Who ever found one? Pete Wells and the Russian did—and they'd like to have it back. . . .

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WHAT DO YOU THINK? 6

IN THE NEXT ISSUE 61

FANTASY BOOK REVIEWS ..... **Sam Moskowitz** 105

Cover by Lawrence. Inside illustrations by Finlay and Lawrence.

Any resemblance between any character appearing in fictional matter, and any person, living or dead, is entirely coincidental and unintentional.

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WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Address comments to the Letter Editor, Fantastic Novels, New Publications, Inc., 205 East 42nd St., New York 17, N. Y.

FROM F. N.'S EDITOR

Dear Readers:

Judging from the flood of mail which followed it, "The Man Who Mastered Time" was a hit with the greater part of this magazine's many readers. I was interested to note that Saunders' cover picture was very well liked, and that the readers have welcomed this artist among the others who have become associated with the name of the magazine. It's all here in detail, in the letters.

The story in the next issue winds up the popular trilogy of "Polaris" stories by Charles B. Stilson. It will be illustrated by Frank R. Paul, who made such a success of the work on the first two novels about the daring son of the snows.

"The Son of the Red God," which was to have appeared in this issue, has been scheduled for one of the fall issues instead, because of the great number of letters sent in.

I believe you will agree with me that the letters in this issue reflect a great enthusiasm for our magazine, and that they show even more than heretofore a profound interest in the selected stories, and a heart-warming and comfortable companionship among the readers in their relationship to each other.

Sincerely yours in Fantasy,
Mary Gnaedinger.

ENGROSSING NOVEL

Dear Editor:

F.N. readers should be pretty pleased these days. In the last few issues we've been getting very much asked-for novels. You've certainly started the year out well. And in the March, 1950 issue, I was especially pleased to read Cummings' famous "The Man Who Mastered Time". Long have I wanted to read this story, and now, thanks to you, I have. It lived well up to my expectations. I liked most of the description of Loto's first trip, and the latter half when his friends went into the future to help him. Despite some weak spots and some weak characterization (as in the case of Georgie who inanely wanted to be mentioned to a girl tens of thousands of years in the future!), this was an engrossing novel and the kind I'd like to see more often. This story, I feel, is the ideal type for which F.N. was intended to bring us. However, I'm not against the publishing of later stories. I've been intrigued by "Three Against the Stars" for quite some time and I'm glad it will appear next issue.

As much as I usually enjoy a yarn by Max Brand, I didn't particularly care for "That Receding Brow." Maybe it was overshadowed by the novel so much that I wouldn't find it interesting anyway, but it doesn't seem that way. The narration of the exploration trek was pretty good, but this story seemed to lack spirit. Sorry.

In "What Do You Think?", I've often noticed requests for reprints of stories that have appeared within the last few years in magazines outside of the Popular group. Don't these readers realize how futile their requests are? F.N. reprints only Popular Publications' stories and that is the *only* source from which I'd like F.N. reprints to be used.

Ed Cox.

4 Spring Street,
Lubec, Maine.

ONE OF THE GREAT ONES

At last we are getting somewhere! "Minos of Sardanes", "Between Worlds", "The Golden Blight" and all the Merrittales—and *now* Ray Cummings' "The Man Who Mastered Time!" I first read that one a long time ago and the rereading of it was a pleasure. There are many such tales that one never tires of.

Congratulations on the *A. Merritt's Magazine!* I'm sure you won't regret the venture. The older fans will still buy it, maybe just for the old memories, and the neo-fans will delight in the stories. They will never be "dated"!

A fan asked about the Finlay Folio, and a reprint edition of it is still available at $1.00 a copy. This is the first portfolio of eight illustrations by Virgil Finlay (voted top artist by Fandom). There is a chance of getting the second portfolio sometime in the future. This reprint edition will be lithographed also.

Many National Fantasy Fan Federation members are steady letter writers to both F.F.M. and F.N. I notice that many fans are in need of back issues, and others want to sell. Perhaps the 'zine I publish will bring results. The *STF Trader* has helped many a fan.

(Continued on page 8)

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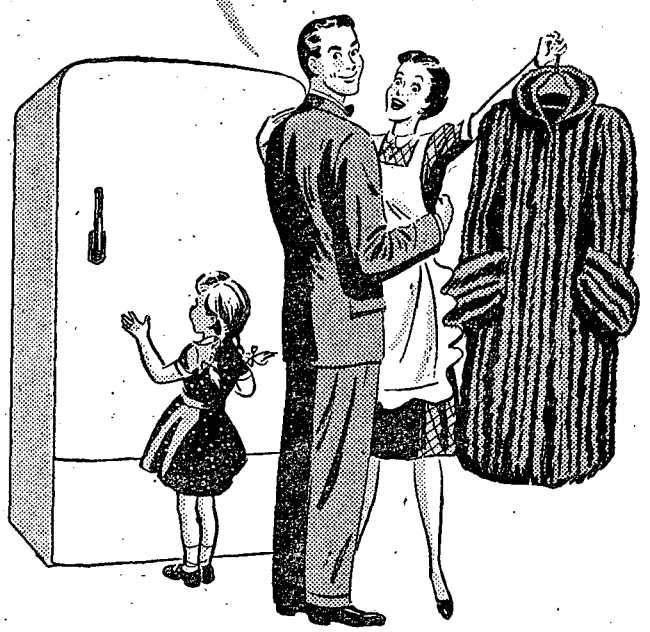

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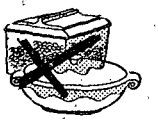

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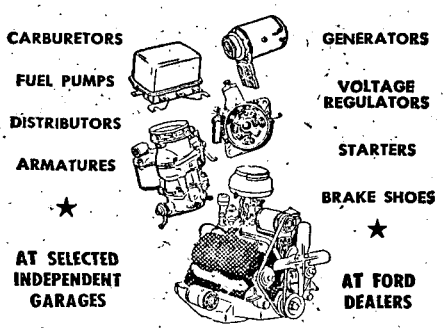

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FANTASTIC NOVELS

(Continued from page 6)

I wish to thank the Editor for many good stories chosen for the readers of stf.

K. MARTIN CARLSON (Kaymar)
1028 Third Ave. South,
Moorhead, Minn.

GRATIFYING NEWS

I wish first of all to say again, thank you for your kindness in printing nearly all my pleas for pen pals in the stf-fantasy field and from seamen and ex-seamen. I've gotten so many letters, I'm nearly (but not quite) too tired, after answering my mail, to read my favourite *Famous Fantastic Mysteries* and *Fantastic Novels*. But no matter what, I still find time to read and re-read the best—F.F.M. and F.N.! Oh, yes, also I wish to include *A. Merritt's Fantasy!* It's great to be able to get his works in a special mag like that.

I'm feeling much better and (though I'm still not able to work, so the doctor vehemently maintains) I'm going to move to Buffalo, N.Y. and try to get a job doing some kind of light work. Oh, by the way, it would be swell if those who write to me would either enclose a self-addressed, stamped envelope (or a penny postcard) if they want an answer to their letters, as it is getting a bit expensive.

This ish of F.N. was one of your best, I believe—and thank goodness—the illos were remarkable—not sensuous—as in so many mags—all in all, a *fine* job, well done!

I lack Chapters 28-45 (part 3) of Austin Hall's "Into the Infinite". Can anyone supply me with it? I'll trade "The Dwellers in the Mirage" by Merritt for it.

Will you ever be able to print any of James Churchward's works, like, say, "Lost Continent of Mu", "Children of Mu", or "The Sacred Symbols of Mu"? I'd sure love to get hold of those three, especially with illos by the greatest illustrator of all—Virgil Finlay!

PAUL GLEN WRIGHT.
938 Humboldt Pkwy.,
Buffalo 11, N.Y.

Editor's Note: I believe all the Churchward books are "fact" books—not fiction—so I doubt if we'd have them in our magazines. I'm glad the fantastic fans are so friendly and helpful.

STORIES MOSTLY SWELL

What's going on here with covers? Do you have a conservative artist or are you tapering off? This month I see the girl does not look like something out of a Ziegfeld production. Keep it up; who knows, in time we may even have some covers which will interest the amateur astronomers and physicists among us. I may be ostracized for this, but how about giving us s-f covers for s-f yarns? My beefs of last month and this apply only to covers; I really think your choice of stories is swell (80% of the time, that is).

Another thing I want to hold forth on (it's my paper I'm using, isn't it?) is Mr. Paul G.

(Continued on page 10)

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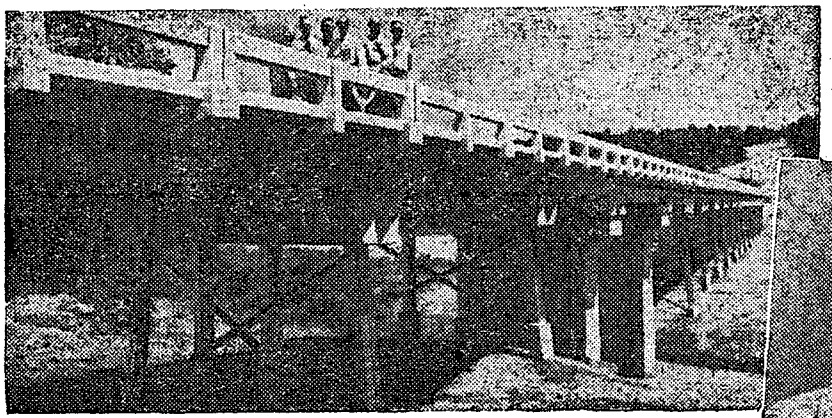

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(Continued from page 8)

Wright. I have written to him and he seems to be a nice person. I would like the editors to publish the following appeal, hoping it may help him somewhat. How about a few more people writing to him? It only costs three cents to make a friend, or sometimes only one cent. And, for the generous fans, how about setting a precedent and *giving* the guy a few mags and/or books? Most of us can spare it, and could be we might want a few pen-pals some day, as he does. I'm kicking through with some stuff I have lying around. How about it?

BRUCE LANE.

1630 Old Shakopee Road E.,
Minneapolis 20, Minn.

THIRD ANNUAL WESTERCON

This is just a note to ask you, and any of your readers that can, to attend the 3rd Annual Westercon, sponsored by the Outlander Society. The Fan Conference held in Los Angeles each year has been, in the past, sponsored by the LASFS, but this year the Outlanders are taking a turn. And we are planning to make it the biggest and the best.

The date is June 18th, the first Sunday after the end of college. The place, The Knights of Pythias Hall, Third Floor . . . 617 Venice Blvd., Los Angeles, Calif. We will have authors, auctions (you might be able to pick up one of your favorites illos. from *Fantastic Novels* if you are lucky), talks on the current trends in the magazine and book field, and lots of talk with other fans. There were over 75 local fans there last year. We hope to double that figure this year. If you can make it, we hope you will try. It is all free, except for your transportation. Come on in and talk fantasy with people that have been reading it from 50 years, to just yesterday. Everyone is invited that has an interest in fantasy or science-fiction.

For further information write Outlanders' Official Unofficial-Secretary, Mrs. Freddie Hershey, 6335 King Ave., Bell, Calif. . . . or to me.

Hope to see you there, and in Portland in September.

RICK SNEARY.

2962 Santa Ana St.,
South Gate, Calif.

8TH WORLD SCIENCE-FICTION CONVENTION

A short note to inform your readers that the site for the 1950 Eighth World Science-Fiction Convention has been selected. The Place: Portland, Oregon. The Date: Labor Day Week-end, September 2, 3 and 4. The name? It's *Norwescon!* You can expect a very enjoyable time there. Meet some of your famous, favorite authors, talk with nationally known fans; get in your bids at the auction for some of those rare books, magazines and original illos you've heard so much about. Incidentally Oregon *is* the "Garden Spot of the Universe"! There is such a variety of scenic beauty as to titillate the most jaded soul. I could go on indefinitely painting the delights of this magnificent wonderland, but there is only one answer; come see for yourself!

For your membership in the Convention mail a dollar to Ruth Newbury, Treasurer, Box 8517, Portland 7, Oregon. In return you'll receive a strikingly different Membership card, the pre-Convention Fanzines, a copy of the souvenir Convention Program Booklet.

Additional information can be secured by writing to Norwescon, Box 8517, Portland 7, Oregon.

JOE SALTA.

1615 SE. 43rd Ave.,
Portland 15, Oregon.

FANTASY BOOK CLUBS—ATTENTION!

I would like to ask you if there is a book club for Fantasy books or Science Fiction or books of this type. If so would you be kind enough to send me the names and addresses of such clubs? You see, here with the Occupation Forces, I don't get a chance to obtain any such books except for *Fantastic Novels* and *Famous Fantastic Mysteries*, both of which are very good, but which come out only every other month.

CPL. LEO C. REASOR.

R.A. 16209049,
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A.P.O. 541, c/o P.M. New York.

LIKES SAUNDERS' COVERS

I thought I recognized the work of Norman Saunders on the cover of the February issue of *A. Merritt's Fantasy*. I was sure of it after reading the credit list for the latest issue of F.N., which featured another cover by Saunders. The fans won't like him crowding out Finlay and Lawrence, but I have always enjoyed his work and I think that having him do an occasional cover will give the other two overworked artists a break and enable them to turn out better work.

Glad to see that you are going to use more of the yarns that appeared in *Argosy* during the thirties in both F.N. and A.M.F.

It was bound to happen sooner or later, a story in *Fantastic Novels* that I did not like. "The Flying Legion" did it! Not that I have anything against Mr. England's writing; it is fine. But I just could not make myself like "The Master", and if one cannot like the main character in a story, that story is bound to be disappointing. I doubt if any group of adventurers would ever agree to follow, unquestioningly, the orders of a egomaniac like The Master. The ol' boy seemed like a glamourized gangster to me.

How about Otis Adelbert Kline's "Jan of the Jungle" or some of his other yarns? Also "The Insect Invasion" and the "Tama" stories by Cummings, "The Immortals" by R. M. Farley, "The Earth-Shaker" by Murray Leinster and I cast another vote for reprinting the Merritt, Howard and other fantasy poems, if it's possible.

VERNELL CORIELL.

1314 Janssen St.,
Pekin, Ill.

(Continued on page 67)

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EARTH'S LAST CITADEL

By C. L. Moore and Henry Kuttner

PROLOGUE

BEHIND the low ridge of rock to the north was the Mediterranean. Alan Drake could hear it and smell it. The bitter chill of the North African night cut through his torn uniform, but sporadic flares of whiteness from the sea battle seemed to give him warmth, somehow. Out there the big guns were blasting, the battlewagons thundering their fury.

This was it.

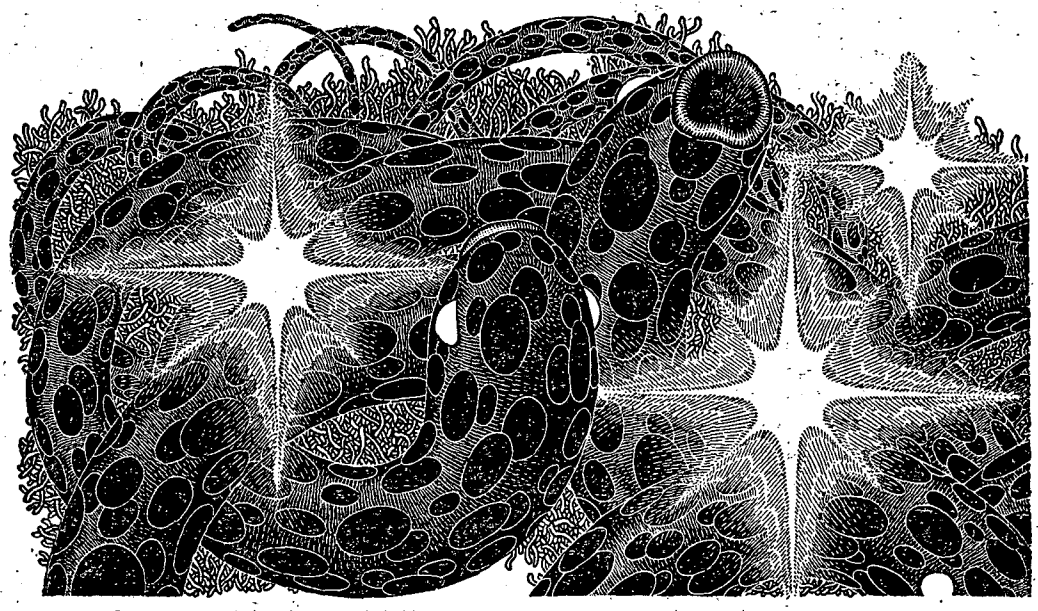
And he wasn't in it—not this time. His job was to bring Sir Colin safely out of the Tunisian desert. That, it seemed, was important.

Squatting in the cold sand, Alan ignored the Scots scientist huddled beside him, to stare at the ridge as though his gaze could hurdle its summit and leap out to where the ships were fighting. Behind him, from the south, came the deep echoing noise of heavy artillery. That, he knew, was one jaw of the trap that was closing on him. The tides of war changed so swiftly—there was nothing for them now but heading blindly for the Mediterranean and safety.

He had got Sir Colin out of one Nazi trap already, two breathless days ago. But Colin Douglas was too valuable a man for either side to forget easily. And the Nazis would be following. They were between the lines now, lost, trying desperately to reach safety and stay hidden.

Somewhere in the night sky a nearing plane droned high. Moonlight glinted on Drake's smooth blond head as he leaped for the shadow of a dune, signaling Sir Colin fiercely. Drake crouched askew, favoring his left side where a bullet gouge

At the dying Earth's flaming Source of Power, Alan Drake pitted puny human strength against the all-consuming Alien's irresistible might—in lost mankind's last struggle for survival....



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"The world's old. What lives in it now is the spawn of age....
Mindless manbirds, worms gone mad with growth. . . .

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ran aslant up one powerful forearm and disappeared under his torn sleeve. He'd got that two nights ago in the Nazi raid, when he snatched Sir Colin away barely in time.

Army Intelligence meant such work, very often. Drake was a good man for his job, which was dangerous. A glance at his tight-lipped poker-face would have told that. It was a face of curious contrasts. Opponents were at a loss trying to gauge his character by one contradictory feature or the other; more often than not they guessed wrong.

The plane's droning roar was very near now. It shook the whole sky with a canopy of sound. Sir Colin said impersonally, huddled against the dune:

"That meteor we saw last night—must have fallen near here, eh?"

There were stories about Sir Colin. His mind was a great one, but until the war he had detested having to use it. Science was only his avocation. He preferred the pleasures which food and liquor and society supplied. A decadent Epicurus with an Einstein brain—strange combination. And yet his technical skill—he was a top-rank physicist—had been of enormous value to the Allies.

"Meteor?" Drake said. "I'm not worried about that. But the plane—" He glanced up futilely. The plane was drawing farther away. "If they spotted us . . . ."

Sir Colin scratched himself shamelessly. "I could do with a plane now. There seem to be fleas in Tunisia—carnivorous sand-fleas, be damned to them."

"You'd better worry about that plane—and what's in it."

Sir Colin glanced up thoughtfully. "What?"

"A dollar to a sand-flea it's Karen Martin."

"Oh." Sir Colin grimaced. "Her again. Maybe this time we'll meet."

"She's a bad egg, Sir Colin. If she's really after us, we're in for trouble."

The big Scotsman grunted. "An Amazon, eh?"

"You'd be surprised. She's damned clever. She and her sidekick draw good pay from the Nazis, and earn it, too. You know Mike Smith?"

"An American?" Sir Colin scratched again.

"Americanized German. He's got a bad history, too. Racketeer, I think, until Repeal. When the Nazis got going, he headed back for Germany. Killing's his profession, and their routine suits him. He and Karen make a really dangerous team."

The Scotsman got laboriously to his feet, looking after the vanished plane.

"Well," he said, "if that was the team, they'll be back."

"And we'd better not be here." Drake scrambled up, nursing his arm.

The Scotsman shrugged and jerked his thumb forward. Drake grinned. His blue eyes, almost black under the shadow of the full lids, held expressionless impassivity. Even when he smiled, as he did now, the eyes did not change.

"Come on," he said.

The sand was cold; night made it pale as snow in the faint moonlight. Guns were still clamoring as the two men moved toward the ridge. Beyond it lay the Mediterranean and, perhaps, safety.

Beyond it lay—something else.

IN the cup that sloped down softly to the darkened sea was—a crater. A shimmering glow lay half-buried in the up-splashed earth. Ovoid-shaped, that glow. Its mass was like a monstrous radiant coal in the dimness.

For a long moment the two men stood silent. Then, "Meteor?" Drake asked.

There was incredulity in the scientist's voice. "It can't be a meteor. They're never that regular. The atmosphere heated it to incandescence, but see—the surface isn't even pitted. It must be tougher than beryllium steel. If this weren't war I'd almost think it was"—he brought out the words after a perceptible pause—"some kind of man-made ship from—"

Drake was conscious of a strange excitement. "You mean, more likely it's some Axis super-tank?"

Sir Colin didn't answer. Caution forgotten, he had started hastily down the slope. There was a faint droning in the air now. Drake could not be sure if it was a returning plane, or if it came from the great globe itself. He followed the Scotsman, but more warily.

It was very quiet here in the valley. Even the shore birds must have been frightened away. The sea-battle had moved eastward; only a breeze stirred through the sparse bushes with a murmur of leaves. A glow rippled and darkened and ran like flame over the red-hot metal above them when the wind played upon those smooth, high surfaces. The air still had an oddly scorched smell.

The night silence in the valley had been so deep that when Drake heard the first faint crackling in the scrubby desert brush

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he found that he had whirled, gun ready, without realizing it.

"Don't shoot," a girl's light voice said from the darkness. "Weren't you expecting me?"

Drake kept his pistol raised. There was an annoying coldness in the pit of his stomach. Sir Colin, he saw, from the corner of his eye, had stepped back into the dark.

"Karen Martin, isn't it?" Drake said. And his skin crawled with the expectation of a bullet from the night shadows. It was Sir Colin they wanted alive, not himself.

A low laugh in the dark, and a slim, pale figure took shape in the wavering glow from the meteor. "Right. What luck, our meeting like this!"

Underbrush crashed behind her and another shape emerged from the bushes. But Drake was watching Karen. He had met her before, and he had no illusions about the girl. He remembered how she had fought her way up in Europe, using slyness, using trickery, using ruthlessness as a man would use his fists. The new Germany had liked that unscrupulousness, needed it—used it. All the better that it came packaged in slim, curved flesh, bronze-curled, blue-eyed, with shadowy dimples and a mouth like red velvet, the unstable brilliance of many mixed races shining in her eyes.

Drake was scowling, finger motionless on the gun-trigger. He was, he knew, in a bad spot just now, silhouetted against the brilliance of the—the thing from the sky. But Sir Colin was still hidden, and he had a gun.

"Mike," Karen said, "you haven't met Alan Drake. Army Intelligence—American."

A deep, lazy voice from beyond the girl said, "Better drop the gun, buddy. You're a good target."

Drake hesitated. There was no sign from Sir Colin. That meant—what? Karen and Mike Smith were probably not alone. Others might be following, and swift action should be in order.

He saw Karen's eyes lifting past him to the glowing surface above. In its red reflection her face was very curious. Her voice, irritatingly sure of itself, carried on the ironic pretense of politeness.

"What have we here?" she inquired lightly. "Not a tank? The High Command will be interested—" She stepped aside for a better look.

Drake said dryly, "Maybe it's a ship from outer space. Maybe there's something inside—"

There was.

The astonishing certainty of that suddenly filled his mind, stilling all other thought. For an incredible instant the moonlit valley wavered around him as a probing and a questioning fumbled through his brain.

Karen took two uncertain backward steps, the self-confidence wiped off her face by blank amazement, as if the questioning had invaded her mind too. Behind her Mike Smith swore abruptly in a bewildered undertone. The air seemed to quiver through the Mediterranean valley, as if an inconceivable Presence had suddenly brimmed it from wall to wall.

Then Sir Colin's voice spoke from the dark. "Drop your guns, you two. Quick. I can—"

His voice died. Suddenly, silently, without warning, the valley all around them sprang into brilliant light. Time stopped for a moment, and Drake across Karen's red head could see Mike hesitate with lifted gun, see the gangling Sir Colin tense a dozen feet beyond, see every leaf and twig in the underbrush with unbearable distinctness.

Then the light sank. The glare that had sprung out from the great globe withdrew inward, like a tangible thing, and a smooth, soft, blinding darkness followed after.

When sight returned to them, the globe was a great pale moon resting upon its crest of up-splashed earth. All heat and color had gone from it in the one burst of cool brilliance, and it rested now like a tremendous golden bubble in the center of the valley.

A door was opening slowly in the curve of the golden hull.

Drake did not know that his gun-arm was dropping, that he was turning, moving forward toward the ship with slow-paced steps.

He was not even aware of the others crackling through the brush beside him toward that dark doorway.

Briefly their reflections swam distorted in the golden curve of the hull. One by one they bent their heads under the low lintel of that doorway, in silence, without protest.

The darkness closed around them all.

Afterward, for a while, the great moon-globe lay quiet, shedding its radiance. Nothing sitrred but the wind.

Later an almost imperceptible quiver shook the reflections in the curved surfaces of the ship. The crest of earth that splashed like a wave against the sphere

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washed higher, higher. As smoothly as if through water, the ship was sinking into the sand of the desert. The ship was large, but the sinking did not take very long.

Shortly before dawn armed men on camels came riding over the ridge. But by then earth had closed like water over the ship from space.

CHAPTER I

THE CITADEL

IT SEEMED to Alan Drake that he had been rocking here forever upon the ebb and flow of deep, intangible tides. He stared into grayness that swam as formlessly as his swimming mind, and eternity lay just beyond it. He was quite content to lie still here, rocking upon the long, slow ages.

Reluctantly, after a long while, he decided that it was no longer infinity. By degrees the world came slowly into focus—a vast curve of a dim and glowing hollow rounded out before his eyes, mirrory metal walls, a ceiling shining and golden, far above. The rocking motion was imperceptibly ceasing, too. Time no longer cradled him upon its ebb and flow. He blinked across the vast hollow while memory stirred painfully. It was quiet as death in here; but he should not be alone.

Karen lay a little way from him, her red hair showering across the bent arm pillowing her head. With a slow, impersonal pleasure he liked the way the curved lines of her caught shadow and low light as she sprawled there asleep.

He sat up very slowly, very stiffly, like an old man. Memory was returning—there should be others. He saw them in a moment, relaxed figures dreaming on the shining floor.

And beyond them all, in the center of the huge sphere, was the high, dark doorway, narrow and pointed at the top like an arrow, within which blackness would be lying curdled into faintly visible clouds of deeper and lesser darkness. That was the Alien. The name came painfully into his brain, and his stiff lips moved soundlessly, forming it. He remembered—what did he remember? It was all so long ago it really couldn't matter much now, anyhow. He thought of the slow-swinging years upon which he had rocked so long.

He frowned. Now how did he know it had been Time that rocked him in his sleep? Why was he so sure that years had ebbed like water through the darkness of this mirrory place and the silence of his dreams? Dreams! That must be it! He had dreamed—about the Alien, for instance. He had not known that name when he fell asleep. His mind was beginning to thaw a bit, and now there was a sharp distinction in it between the things that had happened before this sleep came upon him—and afterward.

Afterward, in the long interval between sleeping and walking, the Alien was a part of that afterward. The things he dimly knew about it must have come floating into his mind from somewhere entirely outside the past he remembered. He closed his eyes and struggled hard to recall those dreams.

No use. He shook his head dizzily. The memories swam formlessly just out of conscious reach. Later, they might come back—not now. He stretched, feeling the long muscles slip pleasantly along his shoulders. In a moment or two the others would be waking.

It would be wiser if they woke unarmed. Whatever had been happening here in the dim time while Alan slept, Karen and Smith would wake enemies still. From here he could see that a revolver lay on the shining floor under Karen's hand. He got up stiffly, conscious of an overwhelming lassitude, and leaned to take the gun from her relaxed fingers.

Above her as he straightened he saw the high, arched doorway, and a sudden shock jolted him. For that dark and narrow portal was untenanted now. Nothing moved there, no curdled darkness, no swirl of black against black. The Alien was gone.

Why he was so certain, he did not know. No power on earth, he thought, could have drawn him to that arrow-shaped doorway to peer inside. But without it, he still knew they were alone now in the great empty shell of the ship.

He knew they had all come in here, out of the desert night and the distant thunder of sea-fighting—come in silence and obedience to a command not theirs to question. They had slept. And in their sleeping, dreamed strangely. The Alien, hovering in the darkness of its doorway, must have controlled those dreams. And now the Alien had gone. Where, why, when?

Karen stirred in her sleep. The dreams were still moving through her brain, perhaps; perhaps she might remember when she woke, as he had not. But she would remember, too, that they were enemies. Alan Drake's mind flashed back to the urgent present, and he stepped over her, past Sir

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Colin, to Mike Smith. He was lying on his side with a hand thrust under his coat as if even in the mindless lassitude which had attended their coming here, he had reached for his weapon.

Mike Smith groaned a little as Alan rolled him over, searching for and finding a second gun. An instinctive antagonism flared in Alan as he looked down upon the big, bronzed animal at his feet. Mike Smith, soldier of fortune, had battled his way across continents to earn the reputation for which Nazi Germany paid him. A reputation for tigerish courage, for absolute ruthlessness. One glance at his blunt brown features told that.

KAREN sat up shakily. For a full minute she stared with blind blue eyes straight before her. But then awareness suddenly flashed into them and she met Alan's gaze. Like a mask, wariness dropped over her face. Her finger closed swiftly, then opened to grope about the floor beside her. Simultaneously she glanced around for Mike.

Alan laughed. The sound was odd, harshly cracked, as if he had not used his throat-muscles for a long time.

"I've got the guns, Karen," he said. A distant ghost mocked him from the high vaults above them. *"Guns—Karen—guns—Karen. . . ."*

She glanced up and then back again, and he wondered if a little shudder ran over her. Did she remember? Did she share this inexplicable feeling of strange, nameless loss, of wrongness and disaster beyond reason? She did not betray it.

Mike Smith was getting slowly to his feet, shaking his head like a big cat, groping for the guns that were not there. Deliberately Alan crossed to the curved wall. He wanted something solid at his back. Curiously, he noticed that his feet roused no echoes in all that vast, hollow place. Walking on steel as if he walked on velvet, he carried his load of guns toward the great circular crack in the outer wall that outlined the closed door they had entered through. Mike and Karen watched him dazedly. Beyond them, Sir Colin was sitting up, blinking.

Mike's eyes were on the gun that Alan held steadily. He said:

"Karen, what's up? Were we gassed?" And his voice was rusty too, unused.

Sir Colin's burred tones almost creaked as he spoke. Faint echoes roused among the shadows overhead. "Maybe we were," he said. "Maybe we were."

There was silence. Four people had dreamed the same dream, or a part of it. They were groping in their memories now, and finding no more than Alan had found to judge by their bewildered faces. Presently Karen shook her red head and said:

"I want my gun back."

Sir Colin was staring about, uneasily rubbing his beard. "Wait," he said. "Things have changed, you know."

"Things may have changed," the girl said, and took a step toward Alan. "But I still have my job to do."

"For Germany," Alan murmured, and gently covered the revolver's trigger with his middle finger. "Better stay where you are, Karen. I don't trust you."

Sir Colin's eyes were troubled under the shaggy reddish brows. "I'm not so sure there is a Germany," he said bluntly. "There's—"

Alan saw the almost imperceptible signal Karen gave. Mike Smith had apparently been paying little attention to the dialogue. But now, without an instant's warning, he flung himself forward in a long smooth leap toward Alan. No—to Alan's left. The revolver had swung in a little arc before Allen realized his mistake. He saw Karen coming at him and swept the gun in a vicious blow at her head.

He didn't want to kill her—merely to put her out of the picture so that he could attend to Smith. But Karen's movement had been startling swift. She slid under the swinging gun, twisted sidewise, and suddenly she had crashed into him with the full weight of her body, jolting him back hard against the closed port. Alan stumbled, and felt the door slip smoothly away. He swayed on his heels against empty air. Mike Smith was coming in, lithe and boneless as a big cat, a joyous little smile on his face.

Motion slowed down, then. For Alan, it always slowed down in moments like this, so that he could see everything at once and act with lightning deliberation. Hard ground crunched under his heels as he pivoted and put all his force into a smashing blow that caught Mike Smith heavily across the jaw with the gun-barrel.

Mike went back and down, teeth bared in a feline snarl. Alan took one long forward stride to finish the job—and then saw Karen. And what he saw froze him. She had paused in the doorway, and it was surely not a trick that had twisted her smooth features into such a look of blank astonishment. Behind her, Sir Colin stood frozen, too, the same incredulity on his face.

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Drake turned slowly, still holding his gun ready. Then for a moment his mind went lax, and what he saw before him had no significance at all.

For this was not the flame-scorched valley they had left. And it was not morning, or noon, or night. There was only a ruddy twilight here, and a flat unfeatured landscape across which patches of mist drifted aimlessly as they watched, like clouds before a sluggish wind. Low down in the sky hung a dull and ruddy sun that they could look upon unblinded, with steady eyes.

Briefly, in the distance, something moved high up across the sky. There was a dark shape out there somewhere, a building monstrously silhouetted against the sun. But the mists closed in like curtains to veil it from his gaze, as if it were a secret to this dead world not for living eyes to see.

Sir Colin was the first who came to life. He reached out a big, red-knuckled hand and barred Mike Smith's automatic lurch forward, toward Alan and the gun.

"Not now," he burred. "Not now! You can forget about Germany. And Bizerte and Sousse and all Tunisia too, all Africa. This is—"

Alan let his own gun sink. Their quarrel seemed curiously lacking in point now, somehow against the light from that dying sun. For Germany and America and England had been—must have been—dust for countless millenniums. Their way did not belong in a world from which all passion must have ebbed forever long ago.

How long?

"It's Time," Alan heard himself whisper. "Time—gone out like a tide and left us stranded."

IN the silence Karen cried, "It's still a dream—it must be!" But her voice was hushed to a half-whisper by the desolation all around, and she let the words die. Alan shook his head. He knew. They all knew, really. That was part of the dream they shared. By tacit agreement none of them mentioned that cloudy interval that had passed between their sleeping and their waking, but in it enough had seeped into their minds to have no doubt there now. This was no shock, after the first surprise wore away.

"Look," Sir Colin said, stepping away from the ship. "Whatever happened, we must have been buried." He pointed to the mounds of sandy soil heaped around the great sphere, as if it had thrust itself up from the depths of the earth. And even the soil was dead. This upheaval from far underground had turned up no moisture, no richness, no life.

"We'd better have our guns again, all of us," Karen said in a flat voice. "We may need them."

Mike Smith returned his guns to their holsters beneath his coat, and laughed with a short, unpleasant bark. Alan turned an impassively icy gaze upon him. He knew why Mike laughed. Mike was making the mistake that many others had made when they saw Alan Drake smile. Mike thought it was the fear of the unknown world, not simple acceptance of altered conditions, which had made Alan give up the gun. Well, Mike would have to learn sooner or later that the gentleness of Alan's smile was not a sign of weakness.

"Listen!" called Karen breathlessly. "Didn't you hear it? Listen!"

And while they all stood in strained quiet, a far, faint keening cry from high overhead came floating down to them through the twilight and the mist. Not a bird-cry. They all heard it clearly, and they must all have known it came from a human throat. While they stood frozen, it sounded again, nearer and lower and infinitely sad. And then across their range of vision, high in the ruddy gloom, a slim, winged shape floated, riding the air-currents like a condor with broad, pale wings outspread. They had glimpsed it before. And it was no bird-form. Clearly, even at this distance, they all could see the contours of a human body sailing on winged arms high in the twilight.

Once more the infinitely plaintive, thin cry keened through the air before the thing suddenly beat its winged arms together and went soaring off into the dimness, with the echoes of its heart-breaking wail fading on the air behind it.

No one spoke. Every face was lifted to the chilly wind as the pale, soaring speck melted into the sky and vanished far out over the unfeatured landscape. Alan found himself wondering if this slim, winged thing fading into the twilight would be the last man on earth, down an unimaginable line of evolution that had left all humanity winged and wailing—and mindless.

Alan shook himself a little.

"Evolution," Sir Colin was murmuring, an echo of Alan's thought. "So that's the end of the race, is it? How long have we slept, then?"

"One thing," said Alan in as brisk a voice as he could manage. "Whatever the thing was, it's got to eat. Somewhere in the

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world there must be some food and water left."

"Good for you, laddie," Sir Colin grinned. "Hadn't thought of that yet. Maybe there's hope for us yet, if we follow—"

"Don't forget, it can fly," reminded Karen.

Alan shrugged. "All the more reason to start after it now, while we're fresh. There isn't anything here to stay for."

"I think I'll just have a wee look inside before we go," put in Sir Colin thoughtfully. "There's a bare chance . . . ." He led the way back inside, and the rest followed, none of them willing to stay out alone in the desert of the world.

But there was nothing here. Only the vast curved walls, the confused reflections of themselves that swam dizzily when they moved. Only empty concavity, and the arrow-shaped doorway behind which nothing dwelt now. The Alien was gone, but whether he—it—had just preceded them into the ruddy twilight of the world's end, or whether he had been gone for many years when they woke, there was no way of guessing.

"If this was a space-ship once," murmured Sir Colin, scratching his rusty beard, "there must have been controls, motors—something! Now where could they be but there?" And he cocked a bristling eyebrow toward the dark doorway.

A little coldness shivered through Alan and was gone. He did not know what he remembered of that narrow door, but the thought of approaching it made the flesh crawl on his bones.

Sir Colin moved as slowly toward the door as if he too shared the unreasoning revulsion, but he moved, and Alan followed at his heels. He was at Sir Colin's elbow when the hulking scientist stooped his big, bony shoulders forward to peer into that slitted doorway they all feared without remembering why.

"Um—dark," grunted the Scotsman. He was fumbling in the pocket of his shapeless suit. He found a tiny flashlight there and clicked on an intense needle-beam of light that flared in blinding reflection from the wall as he swung it toward the doorway.

He grunted in astonishment. "It shouldn't work," he muttered. "A battery, after a million years—"

But it did work, and it was useless. The light, turned to the narrow doorway, seemed to strike a wall of darkness and spray backward. That black interior seemed as solidly tangible as brick. Sir Colin put out his gun-hand and saw it vanish to the wrist in dark like water. He jerked it out again, unharmed.

Alan whistled softly. There was a moment of silence.

"All the same," Alan said doggedly, "we've got to explore that room before we leave. There's just a bare hope of something in there that can help us."

He drew his own gun and took a deep breath, and stepped over the threshold of the arrow-shaped door like a man plunging into deep water. The most hideous revulsions crawled through every nerve in his body as that blinding darkness closed over his eyes. He could not even hear Sir Colin's step behind him, but he felt a groping hand find his shoulder and grip it, and the two men moved forward with wary, shuffling steps into a darkness that blinded every sense like oblivion itself.

Alan's outstretched hand found the wall. He followed it grimly, prepared for anything. He was trying very hard not to remember that once the Alien had seemed to brim this little room, filling the high doorway with a curling and shifting of dark against dark.

IT WAS a small room. They groped their way around the wall and, in a space of time that might or might not have been long, Alan felt the wall fall away beneath his fingers, and he stepped out into the comparative brightness of the great dim hollow again. He had a moment of utter vertigo. Then the floor steadied under his feet, and he was looking into Sir Colin's face, white and a little sick.

"You—you look the way I feel," he heard himself saying inanely. "Well—"

Sir Colin put his gun away methodically, pocketed the flash. "Nothing," he said, in a thinnish voice. "Nothing at all."

Karen lifted questioning blue eyes to them, searched each face in turn. She did not ask them what they had found inside the arrowy doorway, perhaps she did not want to know. But after a moment, in a subdued voice, she echoed Mike.

"Yes, we'd better go. This ship—it's no good any more. It will never move again." She said it flatly, and for a moment Alan almost recaptured the memory he had been groping for. She was right. This ship had never needed machinery, but whatever motive power had lifted it no longer existed. It was as dead as the world it had brought them to.

He followed the others toward the door. The dust of the world's end rose in slug-

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gish whirls around their feet, and settled again as they plodded across the desert. The empty sphere of the ship was hidden in the mists behind them. Nothing lay ahead but the invisible airy path the bird-man had followed, and the hope of food and water somewhere before their strength gave out.

Alan scuffed through the dust which was all that remained of the vivid world he had left only yesterday, before the long night of his sleep. This dust was Tunis, it was the bazaars and the shouting Arabs of Bizerte. It was tanks and guns and great ships, his own friends, and the titanic battle that had raged about the Mediterranean. He shivered in the frigid wind that whirled the dust of ages around him. Iron desolation was all that remained, desolation and silence and—

There was that cryptic structure he had glimpsed, or thought he glimpsed, against the sky. It might hold life—if he had not imagined it. The bird-like creatures might have come from there. In any case, they might as well walk in that direction, lacking any other sign.

The stillness was like death around them. But was it stillness? Alan tilted his head away from the wind to catch that distant sound, then called out, "Wait!"

In a moment they heard it, too, the great rushing roar from so far away that its intensity was diminished to a whisper without, somehow, diminishing its volume. The roar grew louder. Now it was low thunder, shaking the drifting mists, shaking the very ground they stood on. But it did not come nearer. It went rushing and rumbling off into diminuendo again, far away through the mists.

They stood there blindly, huddled together against the immense mystery and menace of a force that could shake the earth as it passed. And while they still stood quiet a faint, thin cry from overhead electrified them all.

"The bird again!" Karen whispered, and with the nervous dig of her fingers into his, Alan realized suddenly that they had been clutching one another with tense hands.

"There it is!" cried Mike Smith suddenly. "I see it! Look!" And his gun was in his hand with magical smoothness and swiftness, lifting toward the pale winged figure that was sailing low through the thinning mists overhead.

Alan's leap was pure reflex, too swift for even his own reasoning to follow. He had no time to wonder why he did it, but he felt his muscles gather and release with coiled-spring violence, and then his hurtling shoulder struck solid flesh, and he heard Mike grunt hollowly. The next moment the ground received them both with jolting force.

Alan rolled over and got to his feet, automatically brushing himself off and frowning down at Mike, who lay motionless, his gun a foot away.

The basic difference between the two men had come clearly into sight in the moment when the bird-creature sailed across the sky. Mike's instant reaction was to kill, Alan's to prevent that slaughter.

Sir Colin hulked forward and picked up Mike's fallen gun.

Mike was up then, swiftly recovered, and poised. Karen stepped in front of his cat-like rebound. "Wait," she said, putting out an arm that stopped him in midstride. "Drake's right. We don't know what the sound of a shot might bring down on us. And those bird-things—what do we know about them? They might be—property. And the owners might be even less human than they are."

"I just wanted to wing the thing," Mike snarled. "How the hell can we trail a bird? It might lead us to food if we'd got it down on the ground. That's sense."

"We mustn't make enemies before we know their strength," Karen told him.

"We've got to hang together now," Sir Colin put in, pocketing the gun. "Otherwise, we haven't a hope. We must not squabble, laddie."

Mike shrugged, his good-looking cat-features darkened with his scowl. "I won't turn my back on you again, Drake," he said evenly. "We'll settle it later. But we'll settle it."

Alan said, "Suit yourself."

IT WAS very cold now. But even the wind felt lifeless as night deepened over the earth. When the stars came, they were unrecognizable. The Milky Way alone looked familiar. Alan thought fantastically that its light might have left it at the very moment they had left their own world forever—to meet them here in an unimaginable rendezvous where the last dregs of time were ebbing from the world.

Moonrise roused them a little. The great pale disc came up slowly, tremendously, overpowering and desolately beautiful in the night of the world.

"Look," murmured Karen in a hushed voice. "You can see the craters and the dead seas—"

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"Not close enough yet to cause quakes, I think," Sir Colin said, squinting at it. "Might be tremendous tidal waves, though, if any water's left. I wonder—"

He stopped quite suddenly, halting the others. A rift in the ground mists had drawn cloudy curtains aside, and there before them, in monstrous silhouette against the moon, stood the great black outlines of that shape they had glimpsed for a fleeting instant from the ship. Misshapen, asymmetrical, but too regular to be any natural formation.

Karen's voice was as thin as a voice in a dream. "Nothing that men ever made. . . ."

"It must be enormous," Sir Colin murmured. "Far away, but big—big! Well, we head for it, I suppose?"

"Of course we do." Karen spoke sharply. Command was in her voice for the first time since their awakening, as if she had only now fully aroused from a dream. Alan looked at her in surprise in the gray of the moonlight. Seeing a chance of survival, she had come alive. Life and color had flowed back into her.

"Come on," commanded the crisp, new voice. "Maybe there's a chance for us here after all. Sir Colin, let Mike have his gun again. We may need it."

"Don't expect too much, lassie," warned the Scotsman mildly, producing the revolver. "Most likely the place has been empty a thousand years."

"We've been acting like a pack of children," Karen declared sharply, swinging a keen stare about through the mist. "There're bird-things here—there may be others. Mike, you do a vanguard, will you? About twenty paces ahead unless the mist gets worse. Alan, drop back just a little and keep an eye out behind us. Sir Colin, you and I'll see that nothing sneaks up on us from the sides. We'll keep as close together as we can, but if we blunder into anything ahead, we mustn't all be caught at once."

Alan's ears burned a little as he obediently dropped back a few paces. When Karen awoke, she awoke with a vengeance. He should have thought of possible danger around them before now. They had all been walking in a dream—a dream of desolation and death, where nothing but themselves still breathed. But the bird-men lived, and there had been that great, strange roaring that had shaken the earth.

As the moon rose higher, it seemed to draw mists from the ground. Presently the

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four drew closer together, so as not to lose each other. The pale, thick fogs were seldom more than waist high, but often they piled up into grotesque, twisted pillars and mounds, moving sluggishly as if half alive. Against the monstrous circle of the moon the citadel held steady, huge and enigmatic.

Out of the moving mists before them came something white as fog, coiling as the fog coiled. Something slow and pale—and dreadful. Mike Smith snatched out his gun. Karen made a futile gesture to stop him, but there was no need. It was all too evident that guns would be useless against this behemoth of a dying world.

Farther and farther, bigger and bigger, the great pale worm came sliding out of the mist. Alan's mouth went dry with sickened loathing as the thing coiled past, moving with a slow, unreal, sliding motion that was infinitely repellent. The creature was thick as a man's height; its body trailed off and vanished in the fog-veils. It was featureless, Alan thought. He could not see it clearly, and was grateful for that.

It neither sensed nor saw the humans. Monstrously it writhed past and was gone, slowly, silently, like a dream.

Sir Colin's voice was shaken when he spoke: "It's probably harmless. An adaptation—"

"God!" Mike licked his lips, staring after the vanished, misty thing. "God, what was it?"

Alan managed a grin. "A worm, Mike. Just a worm. Remember 'em?"

"Yeah." The other's voice was toneless. "But I wonder if everything is that big here."

The black citadel grew larger as they plodded on. They could see now that the unknown creators of that monstrous pile had dealt with mountainous masses of stone as though basalt had been clay. It was not basalt, of course; probably it was some artificial rock. Yet ordinary gravitational and architectural limitations seemed to have had no meaning to the Builders.

Half aloud, Alan mused, "Wonder how long we've been walking? My watch has stopped—quite a while ago, I suppose."

Sir Colin flashed him a whimsically sardonic glance.

"It'll need oiling, at least, before it runs again," he called back.

Alan smiled in turn.

"If we've slept for a million years—we've been remarkably well preserved. I mean our clothes and our ammunition. Powder doesn't last long, as a rule. Plenty of cartridges stored in nineteen nineteen were duds by nineteen forty."

(Sudden nostalgia, even for wars. . . . What tremendous battles had raged and ebbed over the ground they walked on now, before armies and ravaged lands together fell into dust?)

Sir Colin burred a laugh. "It wasna sleep, laddie. I think it was far more than suspended animation. Everything stopped. Did ye ever heard of stasis?"

Alan nodded. "The absolute zero? Slowing down the electronic orbits to stop the liberation of quanta."

"You know the catch-words," Sir Colin chuckled. "Now look: we grow old because we lose more energy than we can take in. Take, for example, a pool of water. A stream flows into it, and out of it. As the human organism acquires and loses energy. Now, come winter, what happens? There's a freeze, until the spring thaw."

"Spring!" Alan's laugh was harsh. He glanced around at the dark, desolate autumn of the world, an autumn hesitating on the verge of eternal winter that would freeze the universe forever. Sir Colin had dropped back until he walked abreast with Alan.

"Aye," he said. "The lochs are frozen with more than cold. The world's old, laddie. What lives in it now is the spawn of age—twisted abortions of evil. Mindless man-birds, worms gone mad with growth, what else we may never know." He shrugged wearily. "Yet you see my point. While the world died, we didna merely sleep. Something—perhaps a ray, or some sort of gas—halted our natural processes. The atomic structure of our bodies, our clothing, the powder in our cartridges—they must not have been subject to normal wear. The pool was frozen. My beard is no longer than it was when I last combed it."

Automatically, Alan fingered his own chin, where the stubble felt less than a few hours old. "And now we pick up where we left off," he said. "I ought to be hungry. But I'm not, yet."

"The ice breaks up slowly. Presently you'll be hungry enough. So will we all. And I've seen no food, except those flying things."

"They must eat. If we could follow them to water, there might be vegetation."

Sir Colin shook his head. "There'd not be much water left by now. And its saline content would be greater than Salt Lake—enough to poison fish, unless they were

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adapted to living in it. The same for vegetation."

"But the flying things—"

"Maybe, maybe. But what d'ye think they eat? Perhaps stuff we couldn't touch."

"Maybe we'll know, when we arrive." Alan nodded toward the monstrous citadel outlined against the moon.

"Whoever built that damned thing," the scientist said, with a curious note of horror in his voice, "I doubt strongly if their digestive systems were at all akin to ours. Have you noticed how wrong that geometry is, laddie? Based on nothing earthly. See?"

ALAN squinted through the mists. The great fortress had grown almost mountain-huge, now. Moonlight did not reflect from the vast dark surfaces at all, so that the thing remained almost in silhouette, but they could see that it was composed of geometric forms which were yet strangely alien, polyhedrons, pyramids, pentagons, globes, all flung together as if without intelligent design. And yet each decoration was braced as though against tremendous stresses, or against a greater gravitational pull. Only high intelligence could have reared that vast structure towering above the mists of the plain, but it grew clearer at every step that the intelligence had not been human.

"The size of it—" Alan murmured, awe in his voice. Long before they reached the building they had been forced to strain their heads back to see the higher pinnacles. Now, as they neared the base of the walls, the sheer heights above them were vertiginous when they looked up.

Sir Colin put out a wondering hand toward the dead blackness of the wall.

"Eroded," he murmured. "Eroded—and God knows there must be little rainfall here. How old must it be?"

Alan touched the wall. It was smooth, cold, hard, seemingly neither stone nor metal.

"Notice how little light it reflects," Sir Colin said. "Very low refractive index—seems to absorb the moonlight."

Yes, the black wall drank in the moonlight. The pale rays seemed to flow into that cliff like a shining river into a cavern. As Alan stared, it seemed to him that he was looking into a tunnel—a black, hollow emptiness that stretched illimitably before him, starless as interstellar gulfs.

He knew an instant of the same vertigo he had felt when he stepped out of the dead darkness of the room in the ship. And—yes, these darknesses were related. Each of them a negation, canceling out light and sound. This wall was something more than mere structural substance. It might not even be matter at all, as we know it, but something from outside, where the laws of earthly physics are suspended or impossibly altered.

Mike's hand was on his gun-butt. "I don't like this," he said, lips drawn back against his teeth.

"No more do I," Sir Colin said quietly. He was rubbing his bearded chin and looking up and down along the blank base of the wall. "I doubt if there's a way in—for us."

"There is no way," Alan heard his own voice saying with a timbre he did not recognize as his. "There is no door for us. The entrance is—there?" He tilted his head back and stared up at those tumbled pinnacles above.

From far away he heard Sir Colin's sharp, "Eh? Why d'ye say that, laddie?"

He looked down and into three pairs of keen, narrowed eyes that stared at him without expression. A sudden shock of distrust for all three of his companions all but rocked him back on his heels in that sudden, wordless moment. *What did they remember?*

For himself, he could not be sure now just what flash of memory had brought those strange words to his mind. He forced his voice to a normal tone, and said through stiff lips, "I don't know. Thinking of the flying things, I suppose. There certainly aren't any doors here."

Alan wondered if a deep tide of awareness was running among the three of them, shutting him out.

As for entering the building—he understood Mike Smith's feelings poignantly. If even Mike could feel it, then there must be something more than imagination to the strange, sick horror that rose like a dark tide in his mind whenever he thought of entering. Why should he behave like a hysterical child, afraid of the unknown? Perhaps because it was not entirely unknown to him. He shut his eyes, trying to think. Did he know what lay within the black citadel?

No. No pictures came. Only the dim thought of the Alien, and a very certain sense that the colossal building housed something unspeakable.

Mike Smith's urgent whisper broke into his bewildering memories.

"Someone's coming."

He opened his eyes. Waist-deep, the white mists swirled about them. In the

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distance, floating slowly toward the black citadel, a quasi-human figure moved through the fog.

"One of those bird-things?" Mike breathed, straining eagerly toward the distant shape. "I'll get it—"

"Mike!" Karen cautioned.

"I won't shoot it. I'll just see it doesn't get off the ground." He crouched into the mists, and slid away like a smoothly stalking cat, vanishing into the grayness.

Alan strained his eyes after the moving figure. It was not, he thought, a bird-creature. His heart was pounding with the excitement of finding something other than themselves moving in human shape through this dust of all humanity. The distant figure flowed curiously in all its outlines—as if, perhaps, it were not wholly human.

A big dark figure rose suddenly beside it. Mike, with outstretched arms. The gossamer shape sprang away from him with a thin, clear cry like a chord struck from vibrating strings. All its filmy outlines streamed away as it whirled toward the citadel and the watching humans.

A wind made the mists swirl confusingly. They heard Mike yell, and through the rolling dimness saw his dark shape and the pale, mist-colored shape dodging and running through the fog. It was like watching a shadow-play. Mike was not overtaking his quarry, but they could see that he was driving it closer and closer to them.

Alan leaned forward, avid excitement flaming through him. Here was an answer, he told himself eagerly—a tangible, living answer to all the riddles they could not solve. What manner of being dwelt here in this last death of the world?

Suddenly out of the depths of a mist-wave that had rolled blindingly over them he heard a soft thudding and in the gray blindness something rushed headlong against him.

Automatically his arms closed about it.

CHAPTER II

CARCASILLA

HIS first impression was one of incredible fragility. In the instant while mist still blinded him, he knew that he held a girl, but a girl so inhumanly fragile that he thought her frantic struggles to escape might shatter the delicate bones by their very frenzy.

Then the fog rolled back again, and moonlight poured down upon them. Mike came panting up out of the mist, calling, "Did you catch it?" Karen and Sir Colin pushed forward eagerly, staring. Alan did not speak a word. He was looking down, speechless, at what he held in his arms.

The captive's struggles had ceased when light came back around them. She hung motionless in Alan's embrace, head thrown back, staring up at him. Not terror, but complete bewilderment, made her features a mask of surprise.

They were unbelievably delicate features. The very skull beneath must not be common bone, but some exquisite structure carved of ivory. Her face had the flawless, unearthly perfection of a flower. That was it—she had a flower's delicacy, overbred, painstakingly cultured and refined out of all kinship with the coarse human prototype. Even her hair seemed so fine that it floated upon the misty air, only settling now about her shoulders as her struggles ceased. The gossamer robe that had made her outlines waver so strangely in the fog fell in cobwebby folds which every breath fluttered.

Looking down at her, Alan was more awestruck than he might have been had she been the wholly outré thing he expected. This delicate, hothouse creature could have no conceivable relation with the dead desert around them.

She was staring up at him with that odd astonishment in great dark eyes fringed with silver lashes. And as the deep gaze locked with his, he remembered for a swimming moment the instant of mental probing in the Tunisian desert, before the world blanked out forever. But he knew that it had been the Alien who probed their minds outside the ship. And the Alien could have no possible connection with this exquisitely fragile thing.

Sir Colin's rasping voice was saying, "She's human! Would ye believe it? She's human! That means we're not alone in this dead world!"

"Don't let her go," Karen cried excitedly. "Maybe she'll lead us to food!"

Alan scarcely heard them. He was watching the girl's face as she lifted her eyes to the heights of blackness above them. Alan's gaze swept up to the fantastic turrets. Nothing—nothing at all. But the girl stared as if she could see something up there invisible to them. Perhaps she could. Perhaps her senses were keener than theirs.

And then suddenly, terrifyingly, Alan knew what it was she could see. There was a mysterious kinship indeed between her

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and the Alien. He could see nothing, but he felt invisible pressure about them all. A presence, intangible as the wind, filling the moonlit dark as it had filled the Tunisian valley by the ship. Something that watched from the great black heights—watched, but with no human eyes.

Karen said, "She's not afraid any more. Notice that?"

Alan looked down. The girl was not searching the haunted heights of the citadel any more; she was searching Alan's face instead, and all the terror had vanished from those exquisitely frail features. It was as if that alien being of the dark had breathed a word to her, and all terror had vanished. Something, somehow, connected her with this monstrous citadel and the Alien.

"Ye feel it, too, eh?" Sir Colin's voice was a burring hush, his accent strong.

"Feel what?"

"Danger, laddie. Danger. This isn't our own time. Human motives are certain to have altered—perhaps a great deal. The two and two of the human equation don't equal four any more. And—" He hesitated. "We no longer have any gauge to know what's human and what is not."

Mike Smith was staring coldly at the girl. "She's human enough to eat food, anyway. It's our job to find out what and where she gets it."

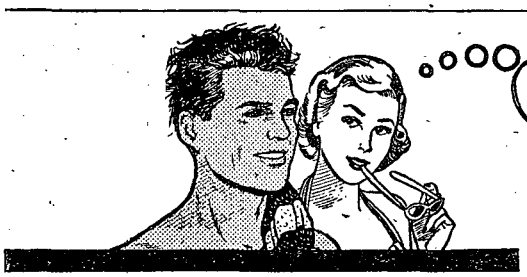
It was curious, thought Alan, that the girl who so certainly shared an indefinable affinity with the Alien did not make them shudder, too.

Now, she laid two hands like exquisite carvings in ivory upon Alan's chest, and gently pushed herself free. He let her go half doubtfully, but she did not move more than a pace or two away, then stood waiting, a luminous query in her eyes.

On an impulse Alan tapped his chest and pronounced his own name clearly, in the immemorial pantomime of the stranger laying a foundation for common speech. The girl's face lighted up as if a lamp had been lit to glow through the delicate flesh. Alan was to learn very well that extravagant glow of interest when something touched a responding facet of her mind.

"A-lahn?" She imitated the gesture. "Evaya," she said, her voice like a tinkling silver bell.

Mike Smith said impatiently, "Tell her we're hungry." The girl glanced at him uneasily, and when Sir Colin muttered



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agreement she stepped back a pace, her gossamer robe wavering up about her. Alan was the only man there she did not seem to fear a little.

With surprising lack of success, he tried to show her by gestures that they wanted food. Later, he would learn why food and drink meant so little to this strange dweller in a dying world. Now, he was merely puzzled: Finally, at random, he pointed away across the plain. She must have come from somewhere . . . There was no response on Evaya's face. He tried again, until a glow of understanding lighted suddenly behind her delicate features, and she nodded, the pale hair lifting to her motion.

"Carcasilla;" she said, in that, thin trilling voice.

"Which means exactly nothing," Karen remarked.

Evaya gave her a glance of dislike. She had been almost pointedly ignoring the warm, bronze beauty of the other girl.

Sir Colin shook his head.

"Maybe the place she came from."

"Not the citadel?"

"I think not. She was going toward it when we saw her, remember."

"Why?"

The Scotsman rubbed his beard. "I don't know that, of course. I don't like it. Superficially, this girl seems harmless enough. But I have a strong feeling the citadel is not. And she seems to—to share a sort of affinity with it. See?"

Evaya's eyes had followed the lifted gaze of the others, but she seemed to feel none of their aversion to the monstrous structure. Her eyes held awe—perhaps worship. But Alan sensed, for a brief, shuddering second, a feeling of unseen eyes watching coldly.

Perhaps Karen sensed it, too. "Come on," she said. "Let's get out of here."

With careful sign-language, Alan tried to tell Evaya what they wanted. She still hesitated, looking up at the unresponding heights. But presently she turned away and beckoned to Alan, setting off in the direction from which she had come. By her look she did not greatly care if the others followed or not.

"Fair enough," Sir Colin muttered, swinging into step beside Alan.

THEY plodded on again in the pale moonlight of this empty world, through monotonous waist-high mists. The dead lands around them slid by unchanging. Once they heard, far away, the faint thunder they had noticed before, and the ground trembled slightly underfoot. Evaya ignored it.

Alan was growing tired. A faint throbbing in one arm had begun to annoy him, and glancing down, he realized with an almost vertiginous sense of time-lapse that the graze of a Nazi bullet still traced its unhealed furrow across his forearm. Nazis and bullets were dust on the face of the forgetful planet, but in the stasis of the ship even that wound had remained fresh, unchanging.

Sir Colin's deep voice interrupted the thought. "This girl," the Scotchman said. "She's no savage, Drake. You've noticed that? Obviously she's the product of some highly developed culture. Almost a forced culture. Unnaturally perfect."

"Unnaturally?"

"She's too fragile. It's abnormal. I think her environment must be completely shielded from any sort of danger. It may be—"

"Carcasilla!" cried Evaya's ringing silver voice. *"Carcasilla!"* And she pointed ahead.

Alan saw that what he had taken for some time past to be the reflection of moonlight on a polished rock was no reflection at all. A glowing disc, twenty feet high, slanted along the slope of a low hillock a little way ahead.

A disc? It *was* moonlight, or the moon itself, tropic-large, glowing with a lambent yellow radiance in the dust, like an immense flat jewel.

Evaya walked lightly to the softly shining moon, stood silhouetted against it, waiting for the rest to follow her. And as she stood there in bold outline, the mist of her garments only a shadow around her, Alan realized suddenly that fragile though she might be, Evaya was no child. He knew a moment of curious jealousy as the smooth long limbs of an Artemis stood black against the moon-disc before them all, round and delicate with more than human perfection. All her lines were the lovely ones of the huntress goddess, and the moon behind her should have been crescent, not full.

Evaya stepped straight into the shining moon and vanished.

"A door!" Alan's voice was strained.

"Do you think we'd better follow?" Karen asked in an undertone. "I don't quite trust that girl."

Mike laughed, his strong white teeth showing. "I'm hungry and thirsty. Also—" He slapped his holster, and stepped for-

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ward confidently, pressing against the shining portal. And—it did not yield.

He turned back a face of frowning bewilderment. "It's solid, Sir Colin—"

Alan and the Scotchman followed Karen to the threshold. The barrier seemed intangible, yet their hands slid along the disc of light as though it were glass. Alan thought briefly that the thing was like the substance of the citadel—materialized light, as that had been solid darkness. Had the same hands created them both?

"The girl went through it easily enough." Sir Colin was gnawing his lip, scowling. "Curious. It may be a barrier to keep out enemies—but why did she lead us here, if she meant to lock us out?"

"Maybe she didn't know we couldn't follow," Alan said, and—before anyone could answer, Evaya stepped back through the barrier. Her eyes searched them, puzzled. She beckoned. Alan pointed to the shining wall; then, despairing of explanations, pressed himself futilely against the strange barricade. Understanding lighted magically, as always, behind Evaya's ivory face. She nodded at them confidently, and slipped like a shadow into the moon-disc.

"It's no barrier to her, obviously," Sir Colin grunted. "Remember what I said—that she may not be quite human, as we know the word?"

"She's human enough to understand what's wrong," Alan snapped, curiously on the defensive for Evaya's sake. "She won't—"

He paused, startled. A sound had come out of the darkness behind them. A sound? No. . . . A call in the brain, echoing from the desert they had crossed. All of them heard it; all of them turned to stare back the way they had come. It was utterly silent there, the starlight shining on low mists, dimmer now that the moon was gone. Nothing moved.

And yet there was—something—out there. Something that summoned.

Alan knew the feeling. It was coming—coming across the plain on their tracks, coming like a dark cloud he could *sense* without seeing. The Presence of the Tunisian valley, of the space ship, of the citadel. Each time nearer, stronger . . . this time—demanding. He could sense it sweeping forward over the dust of their tracks like some monstrous, shapeless beast snuffing at their footsteps, nearing, nearing. . . .

And it summoned. Something deep within Alan drew him out, away from the others. But revulsion held him motionless. His brain seemed to move inside his skull at the urge of that unseen Presence coming through the darkness. The cold starlight revealed nothing. He heard Sir Colin breathing hard, heard Mike curse. A figure moved past him—Karen. He caught her arm.

"No! Don't—"

She turned a white, drained face toward him.

Rainbow light sprang out from behind them. It glowed cloudily across the plain, their shadows standing long and dark across it. But it showed nothing more.

"The door—she's opened it," Mike said in a harsh, choked voice. "Come on, for God's sake!"

ALAN turned, pulling Karen with him. It was like turning one's back on darkness where devils lurked. His spine crawled with the certainty of something deadly coming swiftly nearer. The great moon-disc was no longer flat now, as he faced it, but the open end of a long and glowing corridor of light. Sir Colin lurched through after Mike; then Alan and Karen stumbled in. Alan looked back just as the golden veil of the doorway swept down to blot out the desert. In that instant he thought he saw something vague and shadowy moving forward through the mist. Like a stalking beast along their tracks in the dust. Something dark in the moving fog-wreaths. . . .

Alan put out his hand to touch the golden veil, and found the same glass-smooth barrier that had barred them frome entering, stretched now across the doorway they had just passed.

Karen said shakily, "Do you think it can get in?"

Sir Colin, his voice unsteady, but his scientist's brain keen in spite of it, said in the thick Scots of emotional strain, "I—I dinna think so, lassie. Else it wouldna ha' tried so hard to—to capture us before we passed the barrier."

Mike Smith's laugh was harsh. "*Capture* us? What gives you that idea?"

Alan said nothing. His eyes were impassive slits under the full lids, his mouth tight. There was no use in pretending any more about one thing—the Presence was no figment of remembered dreams. It was real enough to be deadly, and it had followed them, with what unimaginable purpose he could only guess. But

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not, he thought—capture. Mike's primitive instinct was right. Mike knew death when it came snuffing at his heels.

"A-lahn?" It was Evaya's voice, beyond them. Alan looked over Mike's shoulder and saw the girl's exquisite gossamer-veiled figure in the full light of the strange golden corridor. But she was not looking at them now. Her eyes were on the closed barrier through which they had come, and her face was the face of one listening. For one quite horrible moment Alan guessed that the dark thing which had swept along their tracks in the desert was calling her through the barrier of solid light. Undoubtedly there had been some evanescent communion between her and the Presence at the citadel; was it speaking again here?

She was lovelier than ever, here in the full golden light, more flawlessly perfect, with the exquisite, inhuman perfection of a flower or a figurine. She had a flower's coloring, rose and ivory white, with deep violet eyes. Here in the light her hair was a pale shade between gold and silver, and with a curious sort of iridescence when she turned her head.

She was turning it now, as if some faint call had reached her through the closed door. But it must have been very faint, because she shrugged a little and smiled up at Alan, pointing along the corridor ahead.

"Carcasilla," she said, with pride in her voice. *"Carcasilla—vyenne!"*

The great golden passage swept up before them in a glowing arc whose farther end they could not see. Evaya gestured again and started up that glowing, iridescent incline.

As they advanced along the curved floor of the tunnel, Alan realized that this corridor had never been designed for human feet to travel. It was a tube, its curved floor smooth and unworn by passing feet. And its upward slant grew steeper. Human builders would have put steps here, or a ramp. Now they were clinging to the floor and walls with flattened palms, slipping between paces.

Even for Evaya, progress was difficult. She smiled back now and then when her own sure feet slipped a little on the steeply climbing, hollowed floor.

Alan had been keeping a wary lookout behind them as they slipped and stumbled along the tube. But no darkness was following, no voiceless summons echoed in his brain. The Presence, the Alien—whatever it had been—must temporarily at least have been stopped by the moon-disc of solid light which had dropped behind them.

After what seemed to Alan a long time, the tube abruptly leveled, and Evaya stepped aside, smiling. "Carcasilla!" she said proudly.

They stepped out of the tube upon a platform that jutted from the face of a cliff. At their feet, a ramp ran steeply down; to left and right the platform circled out around the rock walls in a spiderweb gallery, as far as Alan could see. It was a curious gallery with a tilted rail around it. Automatically the four from the world's youth moved forward to lean upon the rail and look.

Before them lay the blue-lit vista of a vast cavern. And in the cavern—a city.

Such a city as mankind had never visualized even in dreams. It was like—yes, like Evaya herself, delicate and fragile as some artifice, with a beauty heartbreaking in its sheer perfection. It was not a city as mankind understands them. It was a garden in stone and crystal; it was a dream in three dimensions—it was anything but a city built by man.

And it was—silent.

The whole cavern was one vast violet dream where no gravity prevailed, no rain ever fell, no sun shone, no winds blew. Someone's dream had crystallized into glass and marble bubbles and great loops of avenues hanging upon empty air to fill the blue hollow of the cavern. But it had been no human dream.

Following the others down the ramp reluctantly, Alan saw a further confirmation of that suspicion. For the balcony rail was pitched at a strange angle, and set at an awkward height from the floor, yet obviously it was meant to lean upon. The gallery, like the tube that led to it, had not been designed for any human creature. Something else had dreamed the dream of Carcasilla; something else had planned and built it; something else had set this gallery around the cavern so that it might lean its unimaginable body against it and brood over the beauty of its handiwork.

THEY stood at the edge of a swimming abyss. Here, there were no floating islands of buildings overhead, no roofs below. Only the mirrored pavement. But springing out from the foot of the ramp, there climbed a long, easy spiral of ascending steps, down which pale water

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seemed to flow, breaking in a series of scalloping ripples at their feet, and fading into the blue-green pavement they had been walking. Obviously it could not be water, but the illusion was so perfect they drew back from the lapping ripples instinctively.

All Carcasilla defied gravity, but this was the most outrageous defiance they had yet seen. The broad, graceful curve of the waterfalling steps swept out and around over sheer space, unsupported, made four diminishing turns and ended at the base of a floating tower which apparently had no other support than the coil of flying steps.

And the tower was a tower of water. Its vague, slim, gothic outlines were veiled in pale torrents that fell as straight as rain down over the hidden walls and went gushing away along the steps. The place looked aloof and withdrawn from the rest of the brightly blooming buildings.

Evaya set her foot upon the first step, and smiled back across her shoulder, nodding toward the raining tower above. *"Flande,"* she said.

Dubiously, they followed her up the spiral, at first watching their feet incredulously as they found themselves walking dryshod upon the waterfall whose torrent slid away untouched beneath their soles. But when they had mounted a few steps, they found it unwise to look down. Their heads spun as they walked upon sliding water over an abyss.

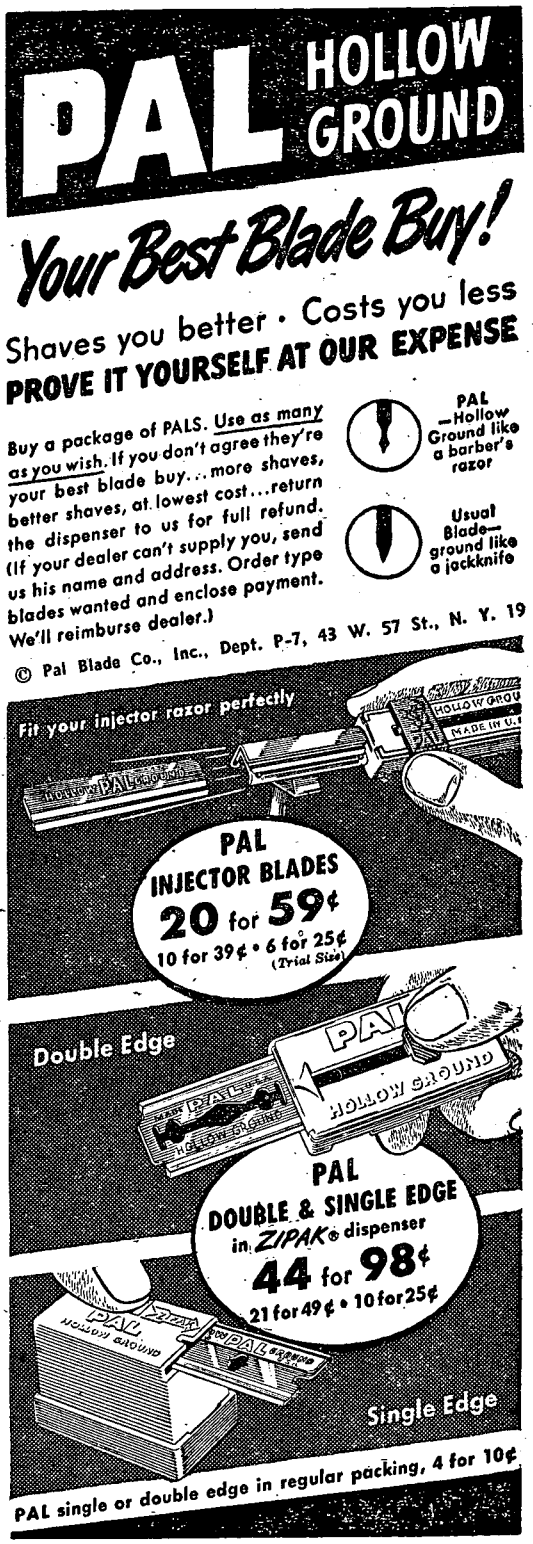
The tower of rain should have roared with its falling torrents. But there was no sound as the illusory water swept downward before them, near enough to touch. And no door opened anywhere.

While the four newcomers stood gaping up, for the moment too engrossed to speak, Evaya stepped forward confidently and laid her exquisite small hands flat against the rain. They should have vanished to the delicate wrists, with water foaming around them. But the illusion evidently dwelt beneath the surface of the tower, for the rain slipped away unhindered beneath her palms.

Unhindered?- After a moment the torrents began to sway apart, like curtains withdrawing. A slit was widening and widening in the wall.

"Flande . . ." Evaya said, a little breathlessly.

The opening, wide now, stopped expanding. Within it were rainbow mists like sunlight caught in the spray of a water-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fall. They began to dissipate, and faintly through them Alan glimpsed a face, gigantic as a god's. But it was no godly face. It was very human. And it was asleep. . . .

Youth was here upon these quiet features, but not a youth like Evaya's, warm and confident and glowing with inner radiance. This was a timeless youth, graven as if in marble, and as meaningless as youth upon the face of a statue a thousand years old.

As they stood silent, the closed lids rose slowly. And very old, very wise eyes looked into Alan's, coldly, as if through the clouded memories of a thousand years. The lips moved, just a trifle.

"Evaya—" said a deep, resonant, passionless voice. *"Evaya—va esten da s'ero."*

The girl beside them hesitated. *"Mai ra—"* she began.

The voice of Flande did not rise, but a deeper and more commanding thunder seemed to beat distantly in its tones. Evaya glanced uncertainly at the little group behind her, singling out Alan with her eyes. He grinned at her tightly. She gave him an uncertain smile. Then she turned away from the great face above them and moved slowly toward the descending ramp.

Mike Smith said sharply, "Is she running out on us? I'll—"

Abruptly, he fell silent, lips drawn back, blunt features hardening into amazed wariness, as a voice spoke soundlessly within the minds of all of them.

Very softly it came at first, then gaining in assurance as though questing fingers had found contact. Wordless, inarticulate, yet clear as any spoken tongue, the voice said:

"I have sent Evaya away. She will wait at the tower's foot, while I question you."

Alan risked a sidewise look at Sir Colin. The Scotchman was leaning forward, his head cocked grotesquely, his beak nose reminding Alan of a parrot investigating some new morsel. There was no fear in Sir Colin's face, only profound interest. Karen showed no expression whatever, though her bright green eyes were narrowed. As for Mike Smith, he stood alertly, with a coiled-spring poise, waiting.

"Do you understand me?" the voice murmured soundlessly.

"We understand." Sir Colin spoke for them all, after a quick glance around. "This is telepathy, I think?"

"My mind touches yours. So we speak in the tongue that knows no race or barrier. Yes, it is telepathy. But speak aloud; it is easier for me to sift your minds."

Alan touched Sir Colin's arm, giving him a brief look of warning.

"Wait a minute," he said. "We've a few questions to ask ourselves."

Flande's great veiled eyes flashed—and a streak of silver fire leaped out above their heads with a crackle of dangerous sharpness.

All of the little group cowered away under it as the sword-blade of silver light flashed across the platform where they stood.

The shelf was wide here, and of translucent clarity, as if they stood on a depthless pool of clear water. There was only quiet emptiness below them as they stumbled backward, the fiery menace of Flande's glance burning tangibly past their heads.

Then Flande laughed, cool and distant. And the burning silver sword broke suddenly into a rain of silver droplets that sparkled like stars. Sparkled and came showering down around them. Karen flung up an arm to shield her eyes; Mike swore in German. The other two stood tense and rigid, waiting for the stars to engulf them all.

But Flande laughed again, a thousand years away behind his veil of memories, and the shower fell harmlessly past them and sank glittering into the pellucid depths of the shelf on which they stood. Down and down. . . . And the twinkling points began to dance with colors.

Alan watched them in a curious, timeless trance. . . . And then—under his feet the glassy paving crumbled like rotten ice. He was falling— He threw himself flat, and the support held him briefly—briefly. . . . Then, in a crackle of broken glass, he plunged downward.

Flande's cool laughter sounded a third time.

"Stand up," he said. "There is no danger. See—my magic is withdrawn."

Miraculously, it was so. The platform spread unbroken beneath Alan's hands, a surface of quiet water. Crimson-faced, he scrambled up, hearing the scuff of feet about him as the others scrambled, too. Karen's lips were white. Sir Colin's twisted into a wry half-grin. Mike muttered in German again, and Alan had a sudden irrelevant thought that Flande had made an enemy just now—for what that enmity was worth. The rest of them could accept this magic for what it was—telepathy, perhaps, group hypnotism—but to Mike

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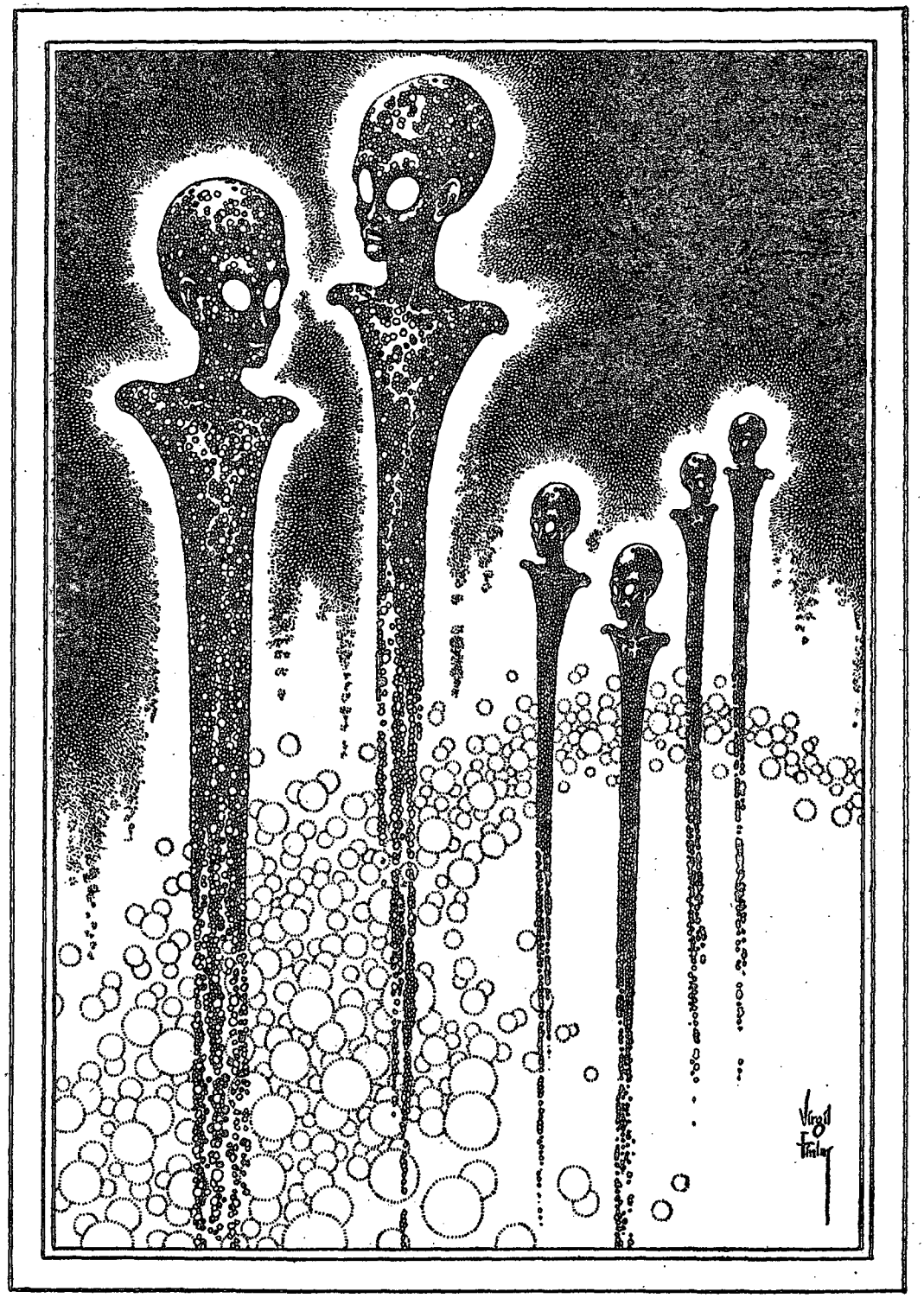

There were legends of the Citadel. It was said that Light-Weavers had made it, and peopled it.

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it was personal humiliation and would demand a personal revenge . . .

FOR A MOMENT, they stood hesitant, facing the great visage that looked down aloofly from the tower, no one quite knowing what move to make. Flande spoke.

"Fools question me," he said. "I think you will not question me again. These you have seen are the least of my powers. And you are not welcome here, for you have troubled my dreams."

The brooding gaze swept out past them all, plumbing distances far beyond the cavern walls that hemmed in Carcasilla.

"You are strange people, from what I see in your minds. But perhaps not strange enough to interest me for long."

Alan said, "What do you want of us, then?"

"You will answer my questions. You will tell me who you are, and whence you come, and why."

"All right. There's no secret about us. But after that, what?"

"Come here," Flande said.

Alan took a cautious step forward, his nerves wire-strung. The vast face watched him impassively.

Still cautiously, Alan advanced, step by careful step, straight toward that enigmatic doorway. No sound from the others warned him. Only the airman's trained instinct, almost a sixth sense, told Alan his equilibrium was going. The pavement seemed as solid as ever under his advancing foot. But sheer instinct made him twist in the middle of a stride and hurl himself backward, scrambling on the edge of an abyss he could sense but not see. The surprised faces of the others stared at him.

He reached out gingerly, exploring the platform until his fingers curled over the edge. Below lay the swimming violet depths of Carcasilla. One more step in the blindness of his hypnotic trance would have plunged him down.

"What the devil, lad—" Sir Colin rasped.

Alan got up. "I almost walked over the edge," he said.

Sir Colin said gently, "His hypnotic powers are very strong. We *thought* you were walking straight toward him."

"And that the platform was bigger than it really is," Alan finished, his mouth grim. He swung toward the tower. "Okay. I get the idea. You're going to kill us?"

Flande smiled gravely. "I do not yet know."

The great visage looked down at them and beyond them, fathomless weariness in its eyes. And Alan, returning that distant stare, wondered at his own daring in provoking the caprice of this incredible being of the world's end. That enormous face looked human. . . . A three-dimensional projection upon some giant screen, or only illusion, like the other things that had happened? Or was Flande really human at all?

Perhaps the face was a mask, hiding something unimaginable. . . .

"Look here," Alan said, making his voice confident. "If you can read minds, why question us? I think—"

Flande's eyes, brooding on something far beyond them, suddenly narrowed with a look of very human satisfaction. "You will think no more!" said the voiceless speech in their minds. It swelled with a sort of scornful triumph. "Did you think I cared where you came from, little man? I know where you are going. . . ."

From somewhere behind them, and below, a hoarse shout rang out upon the violet silence of Carcasilla. Close after it, Evaya's scream lifted, pure silver, like a struck chord. Flande's voice halted the confusion among the four beneath him as Alan took a long stride toward the stair, and Sir Colin whirled, and Mike reached smoothly for his gun.

"Wait," said Flande. "There is no escape for you now. I do not want you in Carcasilla. You are barbarians. We have no room for you here. So I have summoned other barbarians, from the wild ways outside our city, to save me the trouble of killing you. Did you wonder why I practiced those tricks of illusion a little while ago? It was to give the barbarians time to come here, through the gate I opened for them. . . . Look behind you!"

A shuddering vibration began to shake the stair; the hoarse cries from below came nearer, and the thud of mounting feet. Then Evaya came flying up into view, looking back in terror over her shoulder through the cloud of her floating hair.

"Terasi!" she cried. "The *Terasi!"* ....

Flande met her wild appeal with a chilly glance, his eyes half-closed in passionless triumph. The godlike head shook twice. Then the slitted door began to close. Mike Smith yelled something in German, and lifted his gun. But, before he could take aim, the valve had closed and vanished; curtains of rain gushed un-

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broken down the wall. Flande was gone.

Thumping steps mounted the last spiral. A group of ragged savages came rushing up toward them, their faces—curiously clouded with fear—taking on grimness and purpose as they saw their quarry. The leader yelled again, brandishing the clubbed branch of some underground tree.

Clearly these were raiders from some other source than Carcasilla. They looked incredibly out of place in this city of jeweled bubbles, with their heavy, muscular bodies scarred and hairy under the tatters of brown leather garments. All were fair and yellow haired. And on each face, beneath the wolfish triumph, was a certain look of fear and iron-hard desperation.

No—not all. One man was taller than the others, magnificently built, with the great muscles of an auroch, and a gargoyle face. His tangled fair hair was bound with a metal circlet; beneath it black eyes looked out without fear, but warily and grimly purposeful. A new wound slashed red across his tremendous chest, and the muscles rolled appallingly as he brandished his club. He had all of a gorilla's superhuman strength and ferocity, but controlled in a human body and far more dangerous because of it. Now he rushed on up the steps at the head of the raiders, yelling in a great bell-like voice.

This was no place for fighting hand to hand. The steps were too narrow over that dizzy blue gulf, and the water sliding down their spiral looked slippery if it was not.

But it was too late now to do anything but fight. Alan was nearest to the charging savages. And he had no time to think. The leader's deep bellow of triumph made the glass walls ring faintly about them as he came thundering up the steps, club lifted.

He came on straight for Alan, a towering, massive figure.

BLIND instinct hurled Alan forward, his gun leaping to his hand. But something checked his finger on the trigger. He could not overcome a strong feeling that he must not fire in Carcasilla—that the walls would come shattering down around them from the concussion in this hushed city. He reversed the gun in his hand, and swung it, club-like, under the lifted weapon of the barbarian.

And that was a mistake. It was one of the few times that Alan Drake had ever underestimated an opponent. The club whistled down past Alan's shoulder, missing him as he dodged. But the giant dodged Alan's gun in turn, and his other hand moved with lightning speed. A flash of silver sang through the air.

White-hot pain darted through Alan's wrist. His hand went lax, and the gun clattered to the water-gushing steps. Alan looked down at the drops of blood spattering from his arm, where a shining metal dart with metal vanes to guide it transfixed his wrist. These were not quite the barbarians they looked, then, armed with things like that. . . .

Plucking the metal dart from the wound, Alan tensed to meet the charging man.

Hot fury blazed up in him. He hurled himself sidewise toward his fallen gun, catching it on the very verge of the steps. Behind him, Mike Smith roared with a savage exultation that echoed the gargoyle's shout, and cleared Alan's stooping body with one long, catlike leap. The gunman's lips were flattened back from his teeth and his eyes glowed oddly yellow. Mike Smith was in his element. Elsewhere, he might be ill at ease; here he functioned with smooth precision.

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But not quite smooth enough. For before his feet struck the steps beyond Alan, the scarred man had sprung to meet him, one sandaled foot lashing out in an unexpected kick at Mike's gun. Mike twisted sidewise instinctively—and then the gargoyle had him. Those mightily muscled arms closed crushingly about his ribs.

All this Alan saw as his fingers came down on the cool butt of his gun. Behind him, he had a glimpse of Karen and Sir Colin circling desperately, trying to get clear aim over Alan's head. But before they could do it, the man had lifted Mike Smith by the neck and crotch with one easy motion, the muscles crawling under his tattered leather, and hurled his captive straight in their faces. Almost in the same motion he sprang forward in a high leap and smashed down full upon Alan, whose finger was tightening on the trigger.

Alan had a momentary surge of sheer wonder at the lightning tactics of this savage even as he tried futilely to roll away beneath those crushing feet. Then the man's great weight crashed down and in a screaming blaze of pain oblivion blanked him out of the fight.

He was aware of shouts and trampling feet that receded into distance or into oblivion—he did not care.

After a while, he knew vaguely that the torrents of rain had parted again to let Flande's young-old face look down at him. Evaya's voice from somewhere near was demanding—demanding something. . . . He felt Flande's cold, pale stare, felt the enmity in it. He thought dimly that Evaya was asking something on his behalf and Flande denying it.

He heard Evaya's voice ring with sudden defiance. But before its echoes ceased to sound, he fell into a cloudy sleep that was almost as deep as death, drowning all other thoughts.

Uneven lightning-jabs of pain roused him presently, and he knew he was being carried with difficulty on the shoulders of —of whom?— Evaya's people? It didn't matter. Between sleeping and waking, he saw the bubble domes of Carcasilla sliding by.

And now they were moving down a far-flung curve of crystal stairs toward a vast basin of onyx and rose marble which stretched across the widest space he had yet seen in Carcasilla. Its edges were curved and carved into breakers of marble foam. Light brimmed the basin like water, violet, dimly translucent, rippling with constant motion.

They carried him out into the basin, toward a vast, towering, wavering column out of which seemed to pulse all the violet light that illuminated Carcasilla. It was a column of flame, a fountain of uprushing light. . . . Now he could feel the brimming pool lap up about him, cool, infinitely refreshing.

He could see the smooth floor underfoot, dimly beneath the blue-violet surface. He could see a pedestal of white marble, distorted by refraction, out of which the great flame sprang. It must, he thought vaguely, rush up from some source underground, straight through the marble as if it were not there. . . .

They carried him into that light—laid him on the marble pedestal—and he could breathe more easily here in the blue-violet flame than he had in the air outside—breathe against the white-hot pain of his ribs. . . .

The soft, rushing coolness all around him was washing the pain away. He was weightless, his body scarcely touching the marble. Even his hair strained at the roots, and currents swung him this way and that, gently, easily. The flame washed up through his very flesh, streaming coolly, sending bubbles of sensation through his body. Then violet sleep soothed all the pain out of his consciousness. He gave himself up to it, swaying with the uprush of light that possessed every atom of his body.

WHEN he again became conscious of his surroundings, he lay upon cushions in a globe-shaped room through whose aquamarine walls seeped a light that was the very color of sleep itself.

Time passed vaguely as in a dream. The silvery-haired people of Carcasilla tiptoed in to whisper over him, and though he could not remember having seen them before, they were familiar to his unquestioning mind. Evaya sat beside him on the cushions oftenest of all. And later, she walked beside him on tours of Carcasilla when his steps were slow but no longer unsteady, and no memory of pain attended any motion.

He had no memories at all. The roaring, ruinous world he had left milleniums ago, the dead world where he had wakened, were alike forgotten in this strange dream-like state. He did not miss the companions who had vanished on the steps to Flande's house; he did not wonder where the barbarians had gone or whence they had come. Whatever was, was good.

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Alan came to understand many of the words in the Carcasillians' liquid speech, that through sheer repetition grew familiar. And into this drugged mind knowledge crept slowly, as the soft voice of the fragile folk grew more understandable.

They told him of the fountain's magic. It gave immortality. All who bathed in its pulsing light were immortal, as long as they renewed the bathing at intervals. Even Flande came to the fountain at intervals—the voices said.

"Beware of Flande," they dinned into his dulled mind. *"His spells strike without warning. You must be strong—and awake! —to battle him, if battle must come."*

And other things the soft voices of Carcasilla whispered to Alan. He felt neither hunger nor thirst; the fountain breathed out all he needed to live. When the Carcasillians bathed in it, all ills were soothed, all wants healed. And when they wearied of life, the fountain gave them—sleep.

For they grew weary, here in their perfect, sterile world. When they had explored all of Carcasilla, and knew every bridge and building, and every face, and boredom began to trouble them—then they went below the fountain and took the Sleep. Memories were washed away—when they woke again, Carcasilla was new, and everyone in it, and life began afresh.

Thus is had been since the beginning. Lost in the Lethe of a thousand Great Sleeps were the origins of Carcasilla. Yet there were legends. The Light-Wearers had made it, and peopled it. The Light-Wearers had gone long since, but Carcasilla remained, a monument to their unearthly dreams. And the dwellers in Carcasilla were part of the dream that had reared the city.

Only Flande had never taken the Sleep. Only Flande—and the gods, perhaps—remembered all that had happened since the first days. He was afraid of forgetting something—his power, or a secret he held.

Awaken, A-lahn!

Strong the summons shrilled in his brain. For minutes or hours or days, he thought dimly, he had been hearing it. And now—suddenly enough—the curtain slipped away, and was gone from his half-sleeping mind.

It came without warning. He was sitting with Evaya in the mouth of the aquamarine globe, with a great sweep of the city spread out below them. One moment the fantastic vista beneath was a familiar, scarcely noticed thing—the next, a cloud seemed to withdraw, and colors and shapes and distances sprang into focus so sharp that for an instant it almost blinded him.

Alan leaped to his feet, and Evaya rose lightly beside him.

She smiled at him anxiously. And Alan, without an instant's hesitation or thought, leaned forward and took her into his arms. In a moment the spinning world and his spinning brain slowed and steadied, and nothing had any significance at all except the vibrant responding aliveness of the girl in his embrace.

Alan thought he had never known what it was to kiss a girl before. This strong, lithe body was not afraid of the full pressure his arms could bring to bear. She was not, after all, so fragile as she looked. It was like embracing a figure of tempered steel that answered the pressure with a singing resilience, quivering and alive with more than human aliveness.

Evaya stepped back.

"Now you *are* awake!" she said breathlessly, with a little dazzled smile. "But we have no time to talk of anything but Flande now. I called you so long, day after day. But you were not yet healed. The fountain still kept you in its sleep."

Alan caught his breath, remembrance

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coming back with an overwhelming rush.

"That was all real? Not delirium?"

"Real enough. Your sleep was deep—and Flande still stays his hand. I think—I am afraid—perhaps he waits only until you awake. . . ."

CHAPTER III

THE WAY OF THE GODS

FLANDE! Flande and the tower of rain, and the battle on the water-falling steps. It all came back to Alan in an avalanche of vivid memories. Questions crowded upon questions until his tongue tripped. He stammered over them for a moment, then said simply, "What happened?" and waited almost dizzily for the answer. Evaya smiled again.

But she sobered quickly.

"They took away your friends," she told him. "The Terasi, I mean. There was a great fight there on the steps. The evil young man fought terribly, but they took him at last. They struck the red girl on the head and carried her off senseless." Evaya looked a little pleased, in spite of herself. She had made no secret of her aversion toward Karen. "The old man went quite peacefully when he saw there was no hope. He seemed almost interested. I saw him trying to talk to the Terasi leader as they went down the steps."

Alan grinned. In the sudden strangeness of this alien city, it was good to hear one familiar thing about someone he knew. That would be Sir Colin—coolly examining the headsman's axe as it fell toward his own neck. He said quickly:

"Where did they go?"

Evaya shook her head, the silvery hair clouding out around her. "Nobody knows. The Terasi live somewhere outside Carcasilla, in the wilderness underground. Flande put a magic on them and brought them here. And afterward, when you were crushed by the barbarian's blow, he refused to let me bathe you in the fountain to heal your hurts."

Alan nodded, remembering dimly. "You—you changed his mind, didn't you?"

Evaya's face lighted. "I defied him. But—but shivering inside, for fear he might destroy me. I don't know how I found the courage to do it, unless—sometimes I have thought I was once the priestess who opened the doors of Carcasilla to the gods when the gods still lived. Long ago. But I am immortal, of course. Like you."

Alan looked at her silently. After a while he said, "I was wondering if I'd dreamed that."

She shook her head.

"No. It's quite true. All who bathe in the fountain live forever, so long as they renew the baths. You did not dream it. The gods made us so."

"The gods?"

She pointed. Far off through the city Alan could see a disc of blackness set against the cavern wall, tiny in the distance. Before it stood something so bright that its outlines blurred before his eyes.

"The statue of the Light-Wearer," Evaya said, reverence in her voice. "They made Carcasilla and us, for their pleasure. They lighted the fountain, that we might live eternally. Very long ago, I think I was their priestess, as I say—I opened the doors when they called. For there were good Light-Wearers and some—not good. Some who might have destroyed us. So the two doors into Carcasilla can be opened only from within, at the summons of the gods. But the gods, of course, are dead. . . ."

Evaya lifted a troubled gaze to his. "Has one of the gods come back?" she asked him.

Alan shook his head. "You tell *me*," he said.

Evaya said presently, "I felt the call from far away, very weak. And I remembered from many sleeps ago. . . . All memories are washed away in the fountain when we take the great sleep, but somehow, I knew the call. So I went up to the citadel where the gods once lived—and you were there, A-lahn. But I think—A-lahn, I think this god is not one of the good Light-Wearers. If it is a god. I am not sure. . . . I don't wish to be sure. I shut my brain to it, A-lahn, when I hear the far-away echo of that call."

"Have you heard it since I—came here?

She shook her head.

Alan sat down deliberately upon the cushioned, swaying floor. He beckoned, and Evaya sank beside him in a descending billow of her pale garments and silvery clouds of hair. He was trying to keep a tight grip upon the spinning in his brain. There was so much to be learned, and perhaps so little time to learn it, if Flande was watching—if the engimatic thing Evaya knew as a god were calling from its unthinkable citadel. . . .

"You've got to tell me—well, everything," he said. "From the beginning. Who are these gods of yours? Where did they come from?"

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Evaya laughed on an exquisite ripple of ascending notes. "Not even Flande himself could answer all that! The gods? How should we mortals know? We have dim legends that tell of their conquering earth so long ago that we have no way to measure the time between. Great ships, dropping down out of the skies, bellowing thunder and flame. It may be they came from another—world—no one knows that now. They were beings from—outside. They wore light like a garment, and to them humans were—vermin. They cleansed the earth of them. And in the end, the legends say, they ruled earth from those citadels they had built, like the one above, keeping only those humans they had bred themselves, like us. To ornament their beautiful cities. I think Carcasilla is the only one left now."

Alan looked out over the airy suburbs floating before him, not seeing anything. Things were beginning to fit themselves together in his mind—but what stunning things, what appalling catastrophes and immeasurable vistas of time for a man's mind to encompass!

Earth conquered, ravaged, ruined—while he slept his timeless slumbers in the ship. The ship? A ship from space, like those the invaders must have come in? It was the inevitable answer. The being of the golden globe, the bodiless presence in the citadel, the questing thing at their heels in the mist, must somehow be one creature only—a Light-Wearer!

But what had gone wrong? Why had not the—the first of the alien beings—awakened when the armada that followed him came raging down from the skies? Why had this inhuman Columbus slept through the heyday of his race's power and glory, and wakened with his human captives only in the desolation of a time-ruined world?

Perhaps the Alien, first of his kind in a world inconceivably new to him, had misjudged the depths of his ageless slumber. His awakening, in the twilight of a dying world, must have been very terrible. Alan, from the depths of his own nostalgia for all that had passed into dust, could almost feel pity for the Light-Wearer who had come to lead his race to conquest—and slept, forgotten, while the dark sands of time ran irrevocably away. How frantically he must have scoured the empty earth before realization dawned that he was the last of his kind upon this ruined world. The first—and the last.

"Tell me about Flande," he said presently, in a controlled voice. It was not, he thought, wise to think very deeply on the subject of the Alien, and of Earth's ruin.

EVAYA answered obediently, "Flande is very old and wise." (She was a toy, he remembered bitterly. A toy created of human flesh, to amuse the gods of earth. Obedience was bred into her from unthinkable aeons ago.) "Flande has never taken the sleep. None but he remembers all that has happened since Carcasilla's first days. He is afraid of forgetting, perhaps—something. He has many magics, and now he hates us both."

"Is he—human?"

"Flande is—" She paused, closing her eyes softly. And she sat perfectly still, the drifting hair settling about her shoulders. "You see—" she murmured, and lifted heavy lids with infinite slowness. "A-lahn!" she cried, with a curious, sleepy fright, looking at him under drowsy lashes. And she crumpled toward him, yawning with a flowerlike delicacy.

He caught her in his arms, and again he was vividly aware of her blown-glass strength and fragility.

"What is it?" he asked frantically.

"Flande—" she told him in a slow, drugged voice. "Flande—must be—watching. Listening to—our talk. He will not let me—tell you—about him. . . . I'm afraid, A-lahn—A-lahn dearest—the Light-Wearer. . . ."

She relaxed in his arms with the utter limpness of death itself, though he could still feel breath stirring her ribs gently against his arm.

So—Flande had struck.

Well, it had been as good a way as any, he supposed, to summon him into Flande's presence. This—this strange little whisper far back in his mnd was not really necessary. He would have gone anyhow.

But it was not Flande who called.

Another voice—an alien voice—was summoning in the deepest depths of his brain. And beside him, Evaya stirred. "Yes, lord, yes," he heard her murmuring softly, in a voice entirely without inflection. "Yes, lord—it shall be done."

And she sat up stiffly. Her eyes were enormous, staring straight ahead, their pupils blackening the violet iris. Alan said sharply, "Evaya! Evaya!" and tried to shake her out of that mirror-eyed stare. She was as rigid as ivory under his hands. Even her face was ivory, not flesh, its delicacy frozen as if by some inward congealing of the mind. And she rose to her feet.

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She went forward with deliberate steps. And Alan, bemused by Flande's power, could do nothing but follow, knowing with a dreadful certainty what was happening because of the stir deep in his own brain. . . .

So long as she remained awake and mistress of herself, Evaya had kept her mind closed to that distant call. But when Flande put his sleep upon her to stop her revealing words, he had opened the gateway of her priestess mind. . . .

Alan was scarcely aware of their passage through Carcasilla. That stirring in the roots of his brain blinded and deafened him to everything but the slim, cloudy figure moving stiffly on ahead, over the fantastic bridges, the spiraled streets, toward a distant spot which they both knew well . . . too well.

Before the great black circle where the light-veiled statue stood, Evaya paused. Alan paused behind her, a dozen paces away. The calling in his mind was very powerful now. A ravenous call, bellowing soundlessly from somewhere dangerously near.

Evaya touched something at the feet of the blinding statue, and quite suddenly a great flare of brilliance shot out all around the figure. It was like the blare of a struck gong, shivering out in a great wave over Carcasilla. If there could be such a thing as sound made visible, this was it.

Behind him, he heard the rising murmur of many soft voices, drawing near. All Carcasilla whispering its surprise, whispering perhaps with the awakening of memories buried deep behind the forgetfulness of many sleeps. Alan turned slowly and with infinite effort, for some inhibitory power was drugging his nerve-centers now and spreading through his body from that summoning in the brain.

The people of Carcasilla were answering the call. By tens, by scores, by hundreds, they came. Alan had not guessed before how many dwellers the city had. And when the last gossamer-robed citizen joined the crowd, and the wondering murmurs rose in a susurus all around them—exactly then, without turning, Evaya lifted her arms. Perhaps she touched some switch. Alan could not tell what.

She was facing the great circle of darkness upon the wall. Her arms were lifted, and her face. Her voice, clear and toneless as a bell, rang out over the assembly.

"Enter to your people, Light-Wearer and Lord."

A shiver seemed to run over the surface of the black disc on the wall. It was less disc than opening now. The opening to a long, dark tunnel. . . . Far down it something moved—brightly shimmering. . . .

Alan knew that it was infinitely far away. But it was rushing nearer with breathtaking speed. Each stride of its long legs—if these were legs—carried it shockingly nearer, as if it covered leagues with every step. The light-robes swirled around its devouring strides. . . .

It was near—it was almost upon them. It hovered, monstrous and glowing in the mouth of the tunnel, filling the high black circle of its disc. . . .

And then, with one great swoop, it burst into the violet daylight of Carcasilla.

ALAN'S confused impressions of the thing were too contradictory to have meaning. Was it monstrously tall? He could not tell, even as it stood there against the black mouth of the disc. Had it been blazingly robed in light against that blackness? He couldn't be sure. For, here in the light of the city, it was dark—a billowing darkness that swooped down upon its worshippers with a terrible avidity. It enveloped Evaya, who was foremost, in a cloud of nothingness, as if great unseen arms had seized her up in a devouring embrace.

Alan could not stir. His mind had congealed inside his congealed body, and he could only stand and stare, drowning in helpless wonder as he watched. For here at last, tangibly before him, was the nameless thing that had haunted all the hours of his awakening and the fathomless hours of his sleep. The questing creature that had run upon his tracks in the mist, the enigmatic watcher from the Citadel, the being whose dreams he had shared altogether too closely, in the long night-time of the ship.

He stared in frozen dismay as Evaya vanished into the cloudy grip of the Alien. Surely the Carcasillians had come to worship, expecting benediction—not this! This avid clutching grasp, as if the creature had been starving for countless centuries. . . .

Before the crowd about him could catch its breath, the tall, blinding robed figure—it was dark or light?—had tossed Evaya aside with a gesture almost of impatience, and was striding down upon the next nearest. It swooped and seized and enveloped with motion so incredibly swift that the Carcasillians could not have turned or fled even if they wished. And the great, striding god went through them

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like a reaper through grain, snatching up, enveloping, hurling aside figure after figure, and flashing on to the next.

Far back in Alan's brain, behind the helpless horror, the terrible revulsion, the more terrible taint of kinship with this being whose dreams he had known—lay one small corner of detached awareness. In that corner of his mind he watched and reasoned with a coolness that almost matched Sir Colin's scientific detachment. "It can't get at them," he told himself. "Somehow, they're protected. Somehow, the good Light-Wearers gave them armor to wear—like a spiked collar for their pets. Whatever it wants it isn't getting it here. Not yet. . . ."

The stooping and rising and inevitable nearing of that figure almost shook even the cool corner of his brain as it came closer and closer, reaping among the standing rows of Carcasillians. Alan strained vainly at his frozen limbs. Now it was two rows ahead of him. Now it was one— Tall, formless, all but invisible in its robes that were both lightness and dark. . . .

The towering, inhuman thing stooped above his head with an avid swoop, its robes fell about him like blindness to shut out the violet day. He felt a vortex of hungry violence sweeping him up. Vertigo —gravity falling away beneath him—

And then a strange, indescribable, long-drawn "Ah-h-h!" of inhuman satisfaction breathing voiceless through his brain. And a probing—eager, ravenous, ruthless—as if intangible fingers were thrusting down all through his mind, his body, among his nerves, into his very soul. They were bruising fingers that in a moment would rip him inside out, bodily and mentally, as a fish might be gutted.

Instinct made him stiffen against them, with a stiffening of more than muscles. His mind went rigid in anger and rebellion, along with his body. And the thing that clutched him hesitated. He could feel its surprise and uncertainty, and he struck out into the blindness with futile fists, gasping choked curses that were less words than anger made audible. He was awake now, vividly, painfully awake as he had not been since his first bath in the fountain. And he fought with all the fury that was in him against this devouring thing that was—he knew it now—starving with an inhuman hunger for the life-force he was fighting to protect.

This much he knew, in that inviolable corner of the brain where reason still dwelt. This creature was evil made incarnate, and its hunger was diabolic now. It could not touch the Carcasillians; he was its last hope. Its struggles to overpower him were as desperate in their way as his were to be free.

For one timeless instant Alan shared its hunger. And he shared its dismay and sorrow. He knew what it was to wake upon a dying world and find only the ruined relics of kinsmen that once had ruled the planet. Ruin and starvation and unthinkable loneliness.

He felt those gutting fingers thrust down along the track of the understanding thoughts, deep into his awareness, ripping and tearing.

He closed his mind like a steel trap against the treacherous sympathy of those thoughts, closed it as if he closed his eyes to shut out a terrible sight. With a brain tight-shut against everything but the danger he must fight, he stiffened against that probing, ravenous need raging all about him.

And he was holding his own. He sensed that. By fighting with every ounce of strength in him, he could hold his own. And when that strength began to fail. . . .

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The blindness around him rifted now and again in his timeless, furious, voiceless fight. He could catch glimpses of violet light and the awed faces of the Carcasillians, and then dark again. Dark, and the starving desperation of the Alien tearing at him in a vortex of inhuman, demanding need.

And then, suddenly and bewilderingly—the bellow of gunfire.

That half-tangible grip upon him jolted—staggered—slipped away. Alan reeled back upon the slope of the white ramp, too dizzy to see anything clearly, knowing only in this moment that he was free and still alive. And then he heard—or was it a dream again?—a familiar, rasping voice, burred with strong emotion.

"Alan, laddie—gie us yer han'! Alan, here I am, laddie! It's Colin—here!"

Hard fingers dug into his arm, and a ruddy, bearded face, grinning with strain, thrust close to his. "Come awa', laddie—hurry! Can ye no see they're angry? Come awa'!"

Surprise had lost all power over Alan. Sir Colin's miraculous return from oblivion, was not enough to startle him now. He wrenched away from that urgent grip on his arm, his mind taking up automatically what had been blanked out of it when the Light-Wearer swooped down.

"Evaya—" he said hoarsely, finding his throat raw, as if he had been shouting. Perhaps he had, in the blindness and silence of the Alien's embrace. "Evaya—"

He had seen her last lying on the white ramp in a crumple of gossamer garments and showering hair. She was still there, but on her feet now, and looking down at him still with that face of inhuman ivory, the eyes blank mirrors that reflected only what the Light-Wearer whispered in her brain.

The Light-Wearer! Alan whirled, remembering, not feeling the tug upon his arm as Sir Colin rumbled an urgent warning. He could see the Light-Wearer at the very edge of vision, hovering cloudily down the slope. He did not dare look directly at it. The bewildering thing hurt his very brain as the eyes are hurt by brilliance.

It was the gunfire that had jolted it. He was still half in rapport with the creature from that terrible intimacy of the fingers prying down into his brain. He knew it was hesitating, torn between fear of the crashing thunder again, and that intolerable hunger still driving it on.

He could not bring himself to face it, but he knew when it decided what to do. He looked up at Evaya a moment before her toneless puppet-voice broke the quivering silence. It was the Light-Wearer who spoke, but the people turned to Evaya to hear the words it was putting into her mouth.

"Take them!" cried her voice, with a timbre of inhuman fury in it that was not Evaya's. Her arm came up in a commanding gesture that carried a dreadful hint of hovering robes—as if her possession were so complete that even the garment of the Light-Wearer were subtly visible around her. "Take them!" the inhuman voice thundered from her lips. (How hideous—how unthinkable—that the voice of a being not made of flesh spoke now through these lips of flesh!)

A low murmur of anger rose obediently among the Carcasillians. They rolled forward toward the two men, blind, hypnotic fury on their faces. Beyond them the half-seen figure of the Light-Wearer shimmered like smoke upon the air. Alan could feel its thunder beating out at him.

One moment more, he hesitated. The memory of Flande had come back, and he was searching these blank, threatening faces before him. Was one of them Flande? Or was Flande human at all? Was he watching imperturbably through the showers of his raining tower?

"Damn ye, mon, wake up!" roared Sir Colin in his ear. "Ye aren't worth rescuing! Are ye comin' or aren't ye?"

Alan shook himself awake. "Yes," he said. "I'm coming."

The rising murmur of the Carcasillians sounded louder behind them as they hurried up the ramp. Alan hesitated with a moment's shuddering memory of the funnel of infinite blackness down which the Light-Wearer had come striding. The thought of entering it was worse than the thought of turning to face what lay behind him.

But when he looked, the tunnel was no longer there. The great round disc of the gateway opened now upon a passage of gray stone slanting away into dimness outside the violet daylight of Carcasilla's cavern.

Alan glanced back. Evaya lifted a face rigid as ice to him, a blind stare through which the Light-Wearer looked terribly into his eyes. Sir Colin called, "Hurry, mon!" in a voice that reverberated hollowly from the walls of the low passage outside.

Alan stepped through the gateway and out of Carcasilla.

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THUNDER bellowed from Sir Colin's gun as Alan cleared the threshold. The noise was deafening; flinders of stone flew from the corridor's walls as the air re-echoed with the sound of the shot. Alan turned in bewilderment, to see the ruddy Scot's face of his companion wrinkling in a satisfied grin. "I thought so," Sir Colin said, lowering his gun. "Look."

A darkness was thickening over the doorway to Carcasilla. The violet light that poured through it dimmed as they watched, and within moments the barrier of darkness had closed over this gateway to shut them out, as the door of light they had first entered had closed to shut them in.

"It hates noise," Sir Colin grunted. "And it's still—maybe not sure of itself. I've had to use my gun on the domned thing before."

Alan did not at once realize the import of the words. He stared at the black circle upon the wall, a closed gate beyond which the Light-Wearer stood alone with Evaya and her people. He knew it did not belong there. The nameless builder of Carcasilla had put up barriers to keep out just such creatures as that. But now the dream-like city belonged to it, and the dream-like people, and Evaya whom he had known so briefly and so well—Evaya, the most dream-enchanted of them all, with her eyes that reflected the Alien thoughts and her body the instrument for Alien commands.

Sir Colin followed his gaze. "It's all right," he said. "The Light-Wearer can't hurt them. You saw that. But it could hurt us. We're lucky to get away so easily. I doubt if I'd have dared tackle *that*—that *thing*—if I hadn't seen it driven back by the Terasi's drums."

Alan looked at him, belated amazement welling up now that the crisis was over. The Scotsman had obviously been through strenuous activity since their parting. Scars and bruises showed through his ragged clothing, and there were new lines in his haggard face. But the red beard, unkempt and roughly trimmed, jutted with the same arrogant cocksureness.

"The Terasi drums? Those savages—how did you get away from them? And Karen—she's alive?"

Sir Colin patted the air soothingly with a big hand. "Karen and Mike are both verra much alive, laddie. But we'll talk as we go. And mind you keep a sharp lookout, too. The Way of the Gods isna so safe for men!"

"Way of the Gods?" Alan followed the Scotsman's gesture along the shadowy, ruinous corridor stretching before them. Once it might have been wider and higher, but it could never have been ornate, he thought. Now the broken walls gaped into darkness here and there, blocking the pavement with fallen stones. "What gods?" he asked. "Why?"

"They call it that—the Terasi, I mean. And the gods were the Light-Wearers, of course. Didn't ye learn anything at all in Carcasilla?"

"I know that much, sure," Alan said, following Sir Colin over the broken stones that heaped the corridor floor. Here in the semi-twilight of ruin, Carcasilla's perfection seemed like a dream already. But it was hard to leave. He looked back over his shoulder at the closed black gateway upon the wall.

"It's the best way, laddie," Sir Colin said gruffly. "Come along. You'll realize that when I tell you what's happened. And keep your eyes open as we go."

"What do you expect?" Alan glanced uneasily about in the dimness.

"Anything at all. This was a—a sort of experimental laboratory for the Light-Wearers, once. The Carcasillians are one result. There were others." He nodded toward a gap in the wall, darkness within it. "*Something* used to live there, I suppose. And there, and there. Carcasilla's the last perfect experiment, but not all the others died at once."

Nothing moved but the rubble under their feet. But the dark doorways were numerous now, and Alan felt uneasily that things were watching as they stumbled over the stones. "What's happened?" he demanded. "Where's Karen? And Mike?"

"Back in the Terasi cavern, laddie."

"Prisoners?"

Sir Colin laughed. "No. At least—not Terasi prisoners. But I'm thinking we may all be prisoners of the Alien, my boy, and not quite realize it yet. . . . No, the Terasi aren't quite the savages they look. We found that out. It was our guns that saved us, you see. Not as threats or as weapons, but as a sort of promise instead. A promise of knowledge. They're hungry and thirsty for knowledge, these savages of the tunnels. So at first they kept us alive to learn the secret of the guns—how to make them, where they came from, why they work. They had to teach us their language for that. Ye've been missing a long while, laddie."

"You learned their language?"

"Enough. And now we're allies—against the Alien." He shrugged heavily. "Yes, we

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have a verra grave task ahead of us, laddie. The rebuilding of a world, perhaps. But we'll talk about that later. Here—we can go faster now."

The floor before them was a road of shimmering gray metal. No, two roads, separated by a low curbing. Alan heard a rushing sound and felt wind drying the sweat upon his face.

"The Way of the Gods," Sir Colin rumbled. "Follow me now, laddie. Careful does it."

He stepped over gingerly upon the gray road. Instantly his heavy body rose weightless into the air, drifting forward as if upon the current of a slow stream. Over his shoulder he grinned and then beckoned. "Come!"

Alan braced himself and stepped uncertainly forward. He felt a giddy vertigo that nauseated him briefly. He shot past Sir Colin in the grip of the invisible air-river, and went dizzily along the tunnel, trying to right himself. Over and over, heels over head. Then Sir Colin's hand, steadying him.

"Don't struggle. Relax now. There. The current's faster toward the middle."

"What is it?" Alan had fallen into a swimmer's position, head lifted, facing in the direction of the current's flow. Sir Colin drifted beside him. The tunnel walls moved past them with increasing speed, a soft murmuring of air in their ears.

"That gray stuff on the floor must cut off gravitation to some extent. Not too much or we'd smash against the roof. The force is angled forward, so we're carried with it. It's a river, Alan. A river of force. The Light-Wearers used it when they traveled the Way of Gods. It's one of the few things that still works in this god-forsaken place. This, and Carcasilla. . . . Tell me about it, laddie. What's happened since we left?"

And so Alan told him, drifting along over the gray ribbon of the roadway, through the ruins and the darkness of the dead world. It did not take very long. Sir Colin was silent for a while as they floated on along the whispering river of air. Then, "Flande," he murmured. "I had wondered about him. Perhaps some day we'll learn the truth. But for the rest, it fits—yes, it fits verra well! I've learned a good deal since we came here, laddie."

"Tell me."

Sir Colin laughed and flapped his hands helplessly. "All at once? There's a lot to be said. Ye know about the Light-Wearers—how they came and conquered. How they cleared the earth of 'vermin' except for the pets they kept, and the experimental races they bred and interbred. Some of 'em—pretty nasty. And some of 'em still alive, the Terasi tell me, lurking in the caverns, feeding on each other and anything they can catch. I'd never realized *how* alien the Aliens were until I heard about the things they made out of human flesh in their laboratories here.

"But never mind that now. It's the Terasi ye'll want to know of. Back on their own world, wherever it may ha' been, the Aliens had a slave race. Not human, or even remotely human, but made of flesh like us. Not—well, vortices of living energy, or whatever the Aliens are. The slave race may ha' been the Aliens' hands. I'm theorizing, ye ken, but I've found out enough. And ye have to grant those Aliens were builders!" There was awe in the burring voice. "Anyway, when they came here they tried, I think, to make such a race from men. Parts of the brain they must ha' killed; others I believe they stimulated to make men builders, to be their hands as that other race had been. Only—they guessed wrong about humans. The little seeds of rebellion they thought they'd cut away kept growing back. Ah, those robot-humans built machines the like I never saw before. I'll show ye, later. I dinna know what for, but some day I'll learn. But the robot-humans learned something else, laddie. They discovered they were men!"

"Well?"

Sir Colin sighed gently above the soft sighing of the wind that blew along the Way of the Gods. "The Aliens destroyed them," he said abruptly.

Alan knew a sudden pang of loss, irreparable loss, as though history itself had become a book of blank pages.

"It may be," the Scotsman went on after a moment, "that the Terasi are remnants of that race. Or it may be they're descendants of some other experiments the Aliens made. There's been time enough to spare to let the human race rectify itself again from all the hideous things the Aliens superimposed upon them—if that's what happened. We'll never know, of course.

"The Terasi seem to be the only semblance of an independent human race left here. They're living in the great cave of the machines, where the robot-humans fought their last battles millenniums ago. And they're trying in their clumsy way to learn. Out of sheer thirst for knowledge, because there isn't any hope for the future and they know it well. The Earth's dying

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and the race of man will have to die, too."

HE SIGHED again, heavily, and for a while they drifted in silence along the slow stream. The tunnel walls went past in the dimness, opening enigmatic arches upon caverns where the creatures of the Aliens must have lived out their misshapen lives so long ago.

"About the Light-Wearer—" Alan prompted presently.

"Oh. Well, he knows he's alone now, and he knows he'll have to die, too, if he can't get at us. We were domned lucky back there in the ship, laddie, that he didn't suspect then what had happened. He must ha' wakened and gone in search of the race he led here, and by the time he knew they'd come and ruled and died, we'd escaped. I imagine him going back to the citadel and sending out calls all over the world—and only Evaya answered. He followed us to Carcasilla—remember? He was still unsure then, I think, stunned by the shock of what he'd found here. And afterward, when he knew, he couldn't reach us. You were safe in Carcasilla, and we—well, the Terasi ha' found a way to keep the thing at bay.

"It isna flesh, ye ken. Its metabolism isna human at all. It may have no body as we know bodies. So the bullets I fired didn't hurt the creature. No, I think it was the psychic shock of the concussion. It's a highly specialized being in which body had been sacrificed to mind. Perhaps a vortex of pure force. How can we conceive of such a being!" Sir Colin rubbed his forehead wearily, the slight motion rocking him upon the current of air. "Ye recall what happened back there when the devil attacked ye?"

Alan shivered. "It was in my brain—sucking—"

"So I think it's a mental vampire. It lives on life-force—mental energy—and only the energy of intelligent human beings. The Aliens may ha' bred human slaves for that purpose only. And now this last of them's ravenous—starving. And only we and the Terasi are available now. Ye saw how it cast aside the Carcasillians. They're protected, somehow.

"Well, the Light-Wearer came out of his citadel and went hunting. And he found the Terasi. And he came ravening among them as we saw him come into Carcasilla. But the Terasi have a weapon. They have great gongs that make the whole cavern shiver with noise. And noise those Aliens canna stand. Ye remember Carcasilla is a silent city? So they fight him with noise. He's been besieging them a long while now. We dare not leave the city without portable gongs, and even they aren't really powerful enough. The food-caverns—mushrooms and such-like things—are a little way off from the city, and we can't get enough now. He won't let us. We're starving each other out, really." Sir Colin grinned. "But I think the Alien may win."

"So you came after me alone?"

Sir Colin shrugged. "I had my gun. Besides, you saved my life a few billion years ago, in Tunisia, and I wanted to pay the debt. As for why I delayed—I did come once, and couldn't pass the barrier into Carcasilla. This second time I followed the Alien's track."

This was high courage of a sort Alan had seldom encountered, but he said nothing. After a while the Scotsman went on, "I may ha' done ye no favor in bringing ye out of Carcasilla, after all. It looks as if ye're doomed to starve with the Terasi, or die at last as ye so nearly died in Carcasilla to feed the Alien. I dunno, laddie. I think our fortunes lie with the Terasi, but even if we found a way to beat the Alien—what?"

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Now the Way of the Gods grew wider, and chasms opened in the floor and cracks ran down the ruined walls. Sir Colin touched Alan's arm, drawing him out of the weightless current toward one of the broad splits running from roof to floor.

"Here's our way. There was a gateway into this cavern, once, but a shrinking old planet like ours has its quakes. That road's closed. Most of these cracks are blind, but some open in. Here."

Alan glanced on along the Way of the Gods still stretching ahead. "Where does it go?"

"Probably to Hell. I've checked it with what charts I could find—not many—and I think it begins under the citadel we saw back on the plain."

The scientist had produced a taper of some fibrous plant, and lit it. "We've got a hard path to follow."

It wound and twisted upward a long, rough way before light showed ahead, a cold, pale radiance outlining the mouth of a crack like lightning against a night sky. Sir Colin put out the torch. Before them, the depthless expanse of a cavern loomed.

Alan thought irresistibly of his first glimpse of Carcasilla. Here was a cavern again, and incredible shapes filled it. By this time those shapes were mighty cylinders and bizarre silhouettes rising like water-carved rocks from the sea. It was a city of—machines?

If these were machines, indeed, then the Alien concept of machinery was as strange as their concept of human houses in Carcasilla. What lay before Alan was too vast, too breath-takingly immense, to be captured in familiar terms. These towers were machines perhaps, but of a size inconceivable! Only Alien-made metal—or was it plastic—could create such masses that would not topple under their own weight. And they were colored gorgeously and senselessly. Deep colors for the most part. Gargantuan shapes of purple and dark wine-red, and leaning towers of obsidian green.

"Aye," breathed Sir Colin at his elbow. "They were technicians!" There was respect in his voice. And Alan remembered that this cavern had seen perhaps the last rebels of earth, robots turned stubbornly human, fighting and falling before their Alien masters in a saga of courage and futility that was lost like the race that had failed. Only their handiwork remained, enigmatic, impossible.

"What are they for?" he asked Sir Colin futilely. "What *could* they be for?"

"What does it matter now?" the Scotsman said bitterly. "There isn't any power left in the whole domned planet. Come on down. It's not so safe up here."

They mounted a lip of rock, and the rest of the cavern floor was visible below them, a twisting rift of stone leading downward toward it. Against the farther wall Alan could see a huddle of rough huts—more like partitions than like shelters, for what shelter from the elements could men need here? Figures were moving among them, and Alan bristled a little involuntarily. The savage shapes looked dangerous; he could not forget his last meeting with these people.

BEFORE them, shadows stirred, and for one breath-taking instant Alan was back on the shore of the Mediterranean, where Mike and Karen had come out of the Tunisian night with their guns upon him—as they came now.

No one spoke for a moment. There were lines of strain on Karen's keen, pale face, and the blue eyes held an habitual alertness he had seen there before only for brief moments of violent action. Her bronze curls were tousled now, and her clothing tattered, with inexpert mends.

Mike's had not been mended at all. He stood there straddle-legged, a menacing figure of strong bronze, his blunt features restrained to an impassivity more revealing than any scowl. There was an air of iron firmness and strain about him. The sleek black head was roughened now, and he had the beginnings of a black beard. He looked taut as wire—and as dangerous if he should break, Alan thought.

Karen was watching Alan. "So, Drake, you're still alive."

"We all are," Alan said with a glance at Mike.

"You look damn good," the gunman remarked coldly. "Somebody been feeding you well, eh?"

Alan's mouth quirked. "I haven't eaten anything since I left you."

"Where's Brekkir?" Sir Colin asked.

"In the storage house, checking supplies," Karen told him. "Food's pretty low. If we don't send out another party soon to the food caves, it's going to be too late."

Sir Colin shook his head, lips tight. "I want to talk to Brekkir. Come along, laddie. Ye'll remember Brekkir—the man who stove your ribs in." And the Scotsman smiled grimly.

"I remember." Alan nodded, ignoring Mike's sudden bark of vicious amusement.

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There was still, he recalled, a score to be settled with Mike Smith. But not yet.

Under the great toppling heights of the machines they went, mountains of purple and rich deep blues and greens. Dead machines. But whatever air-conditioners had been installed unknown years ago were built for the ages, because the air was fresh here. Windless, but cool and clean. And the dimming lights shone down unchanging.

"What about you?" Karen was asking now. "The Alien—"

"I've met it," Alan said briefly.

Mike showed his teeth. "What is this Alien, Drake? Scotty's been talking about energy and vibration, but it doesn't make sense. The filthy thing can be killed, can't it?"

"God knows." Alan shrugged. "Not by bullets. It's afraid of sound, apparently, for whatever that's worth."

"But it can be killed!" The sentence was not a question. White dints showed in Mike's nostrils. The Nazi had courage, Alan knew for a certainty, but never before had that courage been tested against the unknown.

Mike's years of training with the German war machine had given him certain abilities, but it had destroyed certain others. Nazi soldiers fought to the death because they believed they were the master race, the *herrenvolken*. It all seemed trivial now, and incredibly long ago, but in this one application it was not trivial. For Mike had the weakness and the strength of his kind. When the German supreme confidence is undermined—that fanatical, unswerving belief in one's self—the psychological reaction is violent. And Mike Smith, brave as he undoubtedly was, had for weeks been facing a power against which he was completely helpless.

Over his shoulder Sir Colin said brusquely, "The Alien's not a devil. It's alive, and it has adaptability—to some extent. Without perfect adaptability it's vulnerable."

"To what?" Karen murmured.

"Metabolism, for one thing. Without food it willna live."

"Comforting!" Karen said. "When you think that we're the food it wants!"

Alan saw Mike Smith shudder. . . .

"Hungry?" Sir Colin asked as they came into the huddle of Terasi village under the out-curve of the cavern wall.

"Why, yes. I am. Thirsty, too." Alan felt surprise as he realized it. In Carcasilla the fountain had been both food and drink, but here he was mortal, it seemed. And he was not only hungry, he was famishing. And very tired. That fight with the Alien had been more draining than he had realized, until now that comparative safety was reached. He was scarcely aware of the rude streets they were walking, or of the ragged Terasi who passed with curious stares, or of the great gongs hanging at intervals along the way, manned by grim-faced watchers.

Weariness and hunger made the whole cavern swim before him as reaction set in. He knew that Sir Colin was helping him into some rough-walled house, its roof only a network of pale-branched trellis. He heard Mike and Karen from far away. Someone put a spongy bread-like object in his hands and he tore at it ravenously, remembering the Alien's hunger with a wry sympathy now as he ate the mushroomy thing in his hand.

It helped a little. Sir Colin poured water into a metal cup and handed it to him, smiling. "There's no whuskey," he said gravely, "which probably accounts for the downfall of mankind."

The water was sweet and good, but food and drink were not all his wants now. He felt drained dry of energy by that terrible bout with the Alien. And he knew—he sensed unerringly that the Alien was not yet finished with him. He could feel it in the back of his mind as he ate and drank. Somewhere it was waiting, watching. . . .

"Sleep now," Sir Colin urged from somewhere outside the closed circle of his weariness. "We'll wake you if anything happens."

He did not even know when gentle hands led him to the bed.

CHAPTER IV

THE PORTALS OF LIGHT

A DEEP, resonant vibration, shivering through the room, wakened Alan. He lay there staring, uncertain where he was. The sound came again as he lay blinking, and this time he recognized it and sat up abruptly, lifting one hand to his stubby cheek. The beard was beginning to grow again, as it had never grown in Carcasilla. But he had no time to wonder over that, for the gong was ringing desperately now and the whole cavern seemed to resound with that ominous sound.

Alan was halfway to the door when Sir Colin came in, grinning.

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"False alarm—we hope," he said, and cocked his head to listen. The gonging vibrations died slowly outside. "How d'ye feel this morning, laddie?"

"Better—all right. But that gong—"

"A sentry thought he saw the Light-Wearer shimmering in one of the crevices. That was all. He started an alarm, and the others are watching. Ye'll know soon enough if the thing's really there. D'ye feel like meeting Brekkir this morning?"

"Brekkir?" Alan echoed. "The leader, eh? Sure, bring him in. Is it really morning?"

Sir Colin laughed again. "How can I tell? They measure time differently here. Brekkir's waiting outside. I'll call him."

He stepped to the door and lifted his voice. A moment later Karen and Mike came in, nodding briefly to Alan's greeting. Behind them a great ragged figure entered. The same tattered savage, magnificent as an auroch in his breadth of shoulder and tremendous depth of chest, who had come charging up Flande's spiral waterfall with terror and determination on his hideously scarred face. The same shouting barbarian whom Alan had last seen above him, driving his heels down crushingly into Alan's ribs.

A glint of sardonic humor gleamed in the man's deeply recessed eyes. Alan braced himself warily as the Terasi came forward and put his great hands on the other's shoulders, stood back at arm's length to scrutinize Alan with a look of wonder growing on his harsh face. He said something to Sir Colin in a deep-chested guttural.

The Scotsman answered, nodding toward Alan. When he had finished, "Brekkir wonders at your recuperative powers," he translated. "He says he gave you mortal wounds."

"I'd have died, all right," Alan said grimly. "It was the fountain that saved me."

Sir Colin gave Brekkir the words in his own tongue. The Terasi's shaggy brows lifted. He pushed aside Alan's shirt and ran calloused fingers along the healed scars that banded his torso. Excitement shook his voice when he spoke again.

The Scotsman answered, and he, too, was excited.

Karen broke in to ask, "A power source? What does he mean?"

"I'm not sure. But this is something I hadn't expected, though I should have guessed from what Alan's been saying. If Brekkir's right, we may have the answer to all our problems. Though it seems incredible!"

Alan stared. "What is it?"

"I'd best show you on the scanners. There's so much to explain. Look—Karen's brought your breakfast. Eat it while Brekkir and I talk."

Alan let himself be pushed down to a seat before a makeshift table of plastic blocks, and Karen set more of the mushroom-bread before him, and a cup of water. She was watching Brekkir's scarred face, bright with a sort of triumph, as he argued vehemently against Sir Colin's cool questions. Mike watched, too, though obviously the flurry of quick discussion was a little beyond him. Strange, thought Alan, how little they had changed in these weeks apart.

But it was not wise to think, somehow. For so long he had been half-asleep, his mind dulled, living in the incarnate dream that was Carcasilla. His thoughts felt strange now. It was difficult to believe in the reality of anything that had happened. The act of independent thinking was like resuming the use of a paralyzed limb. His brain did not feel entirely the brain of Alan Drake.

He had the curious illusion of seeing through the wrong end of a telescope. Brekkir was a tiny figure gesticulating to a microscopic Sir Colin. He saw them with objective coldness, as if they were beings of a different species.

Deep in his mind a furtive, cold horror stirred. But far down, smothered under clouds of lassitude, Alan's awareness of *himself* faded. His own body seemed alien, no part of his consciousness. And a slow desire was rising in him that had no kinship with human passions. It was in his mind, tiny and far away, and then leaping forward with great striding bounds, as the Light-Wearer had come from the Way of the Gods.

It was hunger he felt, that deep and terrible desire—ravenous hunger for—what? Hunger, and beyond it a desperate solitude. He was alone. He was wandering in some formless place, searching amid great ruins that breathed out desolation. And the hunger grew and grew.

He heard Sir Colin's voice faintly; the sound was unpleasant. It grated on his senses. He struggled against the grip of strong hands whose touch was hateful.

"Alan! For God's sake, wake up!"

But he was awake—for the first time. This creature was trying to stop him from returning to Carcasilla. That was it! He must go back! Only there could he find appeasement for this dreadful hunger that

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burned him. He must go back to the Light-Wearer, open his mind—but no, he *was* the Light-Wearer; Alan Drake was the willing sacrifice.

"Karen!" the burring, alien voice called again, tiny and distant. "Mike, help me hold him! He'll kill—"

And Mike Smith's strained voice. "Let him! Let him go! The Alien's here—I can feel it! Those gongs were right. It's come, it's here in this room!"

Then Karen's swift steps racing across the floor and her hard, small fist cracking savagely against Alan's jaw. Blaze of pain; flashing lights. Then a timeless eternity of groping, a frantic striving for orientation. The world steadied. Sick and weak, now, from reaction, Alan saw an altered world—a normal-sized Sir Colin flung aside by a towering Brekkir who charged forward with shoulders hunched, eyes hot and deadly.

It was instinct that showed Alan the gun at Karen's belt. He was not yet wholly back in his own mind, perhaps, but his body thought for him. The metal was cold against his palm. He swung the pistol up unwaveringly at Brekkir while the room lurched around him, knowing only that if he revealed weakness now he was gone.

"Hold it!" he snapped, hearing his own cold voice still a little alien to his ears. But he was himself now. The possessor was gone. And it must have shown on his face and in his impassive eyes under the full lids, for Brekkir paused, reading danger in the voice he could not understand. A second of indecision, and then Brekkir shook himself and stepped back, his breath coming in heavy, uneven gusts.

"All right, Karen?" Alan asked without looking at her. "Will he—"

"I don't know. Sir Colin's the only one who can handle him. Whatever happened, it was bad."

Mike Smith licked dry lips. "It was the Alien. He was *here*. He was *you*."

Sir Colin got painfully to his feet, came forward to put an arm about Brekkir's great shoulders. The Terasi muttered, shaken. Sir Colin answered briefly.

"Gie me yer gun, Alan. He doesna trust you. It's all right now, but gie me the gun."

Alan laid it in his outstretched hand, hesitating a little. Brekkir seemed relieved, but his smouldering eyes still brooded upon the other. Sir Colin said:

"All right now, laddie? Ah-h. But—God, mon! What happened? Ye were—were—"

ALAN sat down heavily. "I'm all right now. But I could stand a drink."

"Hold hard." Sir Colin's grip steadied his shoulder. "Let me see your eyes. Yet. . . . But for a while they were all pupil. Black as the mouth of Hell! I'll admit, ye've shaken me. But I think I know the answer."

"You do?" Alan moistened his lips. "Then tell me."

"It was the Alien, laddie. Ye are verra, verra sensitive to that creature. Like a bit of iron sensitized by a magnet. It may pass. I trust it will."

Alan pressed his palms against aching eyes. "It's like being possessed of a devil."

"It is that! Ye maun fight it, then. If it can control ye from a distance—yet ye fought the thing in Carcasilla."

"I hope to God it never happens again," Alan said in a shaken voice. "The worst part was that I—I liked it. I lost all sense of personal identity." His teeth showed in a furious grin. "I—let's not talk about it just now."

Sir Colin glanced at him sharply for a moment, then seemed satisfied. "Aye, but Brekkir—"

At the sound of his name the Terasi

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glowered and muttered something. Sir Colin nibbled his lower lip. "Brekkir fears ye, laddie. Or rather fears your falling under the Alien's control. It's like having a spy from the enemy in your camp. Ye'd better stick close to me. I've promised Brekkir I'll keep my eye on ye."

A voice shouted from outside. Brekkir listened, then grunted to Sir Colin and hurried out. The Scotsman grunted in turn. "Come along, all of ye. Trouble, as usual. And a good thing for you, Alan; it'll give Brekkir something else to think about!"

They hurried through the Terasi village, where ragged savages shrank away from Alan with loathing in their eyes. Evidently rumor had run fast through the town. But the gongs were not booming now, which was one small comfort. The Alien had withdrawn—for a time, and for its own purposes. They were to know in a moment what those purposes were.

Sir Colin led them at Brekkir's heels around the base of a vast leaning tower of deep-green plastic and in through a sloping door in its base. Spiral stairs rose steeply. They were all dizzy with the rapid turns before they came out into a domed room high above the cavern floor. A sort of frieze ran about the circular wall, head-high, divided into foot-long rectangles of cloudy glass. Beneath each were several wheels like safe-dials. Most of the screens bore decorative designs, but the one before which Brekkir stopped showed a picture.

A picture of Evaya!

Alan pushed closer, staring. He seemed to be looking down upon the scene, and from one side. The screen was full of motion now—full of the men and women of Carcasilla, streaming along the Way of the Gods, their faces glowing with fanatical exultation. And Evaya walked before them, her lovely pale hair drifting upon the air-currents, her face blank with the blankness of her possession.

"A television plate in the passage," Sir Colin's precise explanation came. "This is the scanner room, Alan. It connects with thousands of viewers scattered through the caverns, many of them not working any more, of course. Watch."

Brekkir spun a dial; a new scene showed—the Way of the Gods, bare and empty. Far away along it, motion stirred. The swirl of gossamer robes, pale faces crowding. And then—striding with great swooping bounds, robed in darkness and in light, in fire and cloud—came the shape that no eyes could clearly see. Leading the Carcasillians strode their god, the Light-Wearer.

A shock of dismay shook Alan. He felt Brekkir's shoulder beside him heave convulsively. Mike Smith made a hoarse, wordless sound deep in his throat.

"Logical," Sir Colin said quietly, as though he were lecturing at Edinburgh. "I should have foreseen this. They have no weapons yet, but I don't doubt *It* knows where to find weapons."

"What are you talking about?" Mike snapped. "Is it coming here?"

"Certainly. Where else? It wants food, and we are its food, not the Carcasillians. It can't pass our sonic protection alone, so it calls in the Carcasillians as an attacking force, to silence our gongs if they can. After that. . . ."

Brekkir barked an order over his shoulder. One of the Terasi in the room went out swiftly. Brekkir pulled at his beard and eyed Sir Colin. The Scotsman grunted.

"Less than a hundred Terasi, but the women can fight, too. The Carcasillians—how many, Alan?"

"Several hundred, I'd guess."

"They'll be no match for us, alone. But depend on it, they'll have some sort of weapons when they get here."

Alan turned his mind from the sickening picture of the delicate doll-army from Carcasilla falling beneath the bludgeons of the Terasi. But he knew he could not protest. The Terasi were right. Even Evaya's blown-glass loveliness was a vessel for the Alien now—a vessel to be shattered.

He would not think of it.

Brekkir grunted something behind him, and Sir Colin nodded.

"Forget that now. Tell me about the fountain, laddie. All you remember. It's important."

"There isn't much to tell." Alan frowned, remembering.

"It's still alive? Still powerful?"

"Well, it healed me. And it gives the Carcasillians immortality."

Sir Colin spoke to Brekkir, who fumbled with the dials.

"Here's the story, laddie. Listen now, it's important. Forget the Carcasillians while ye can. It may be we've got the solution right here in our hands—if we live through the next few hours. This rebel race that lived here in the cavern was a sort of maintenance crew for the Way of the Gods. It kept the worlds alive along it. So we have these scanners and other things. It's a library, too. There are visual

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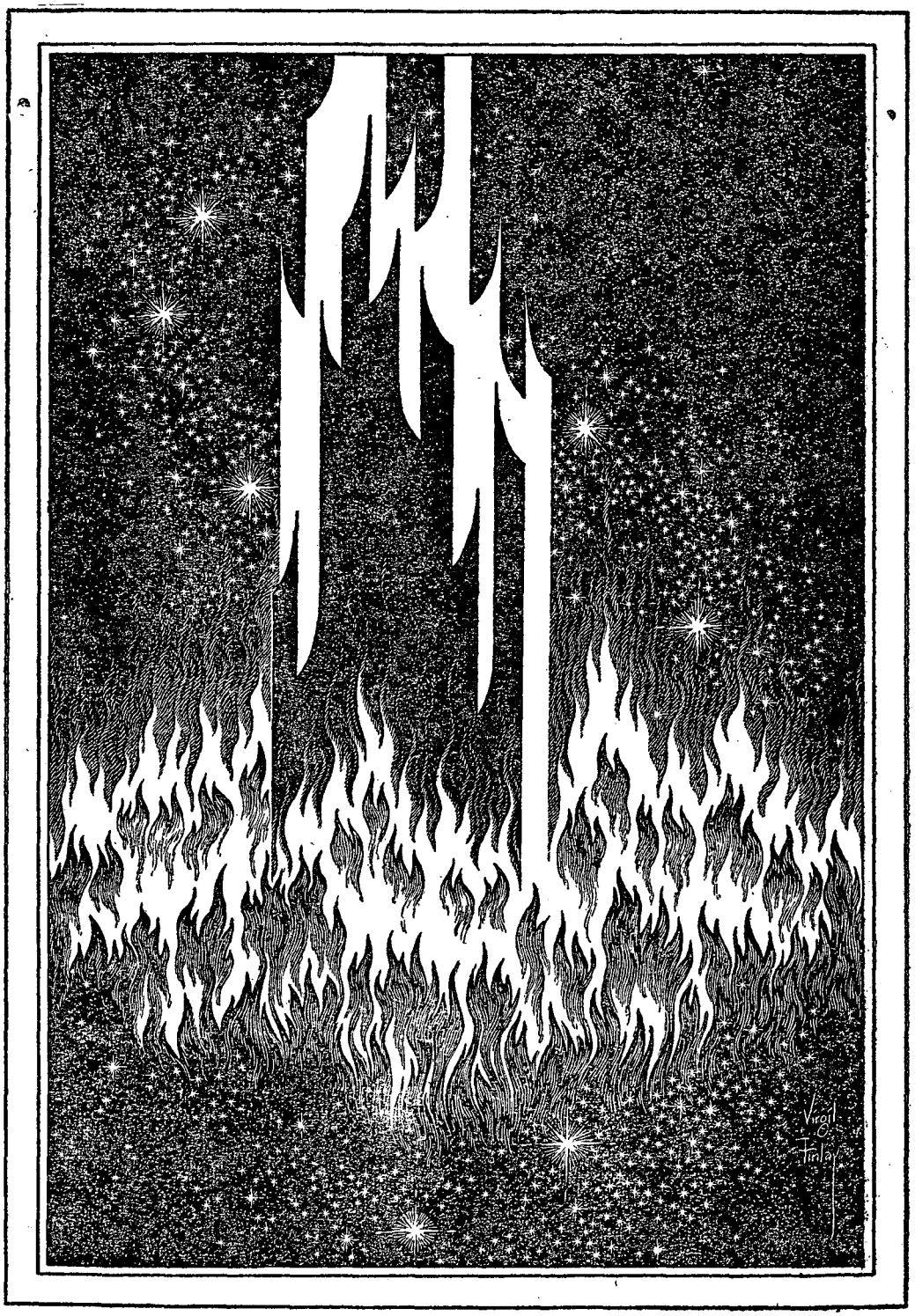

They were cities of flame, where monstrous citadels floated upon lakes like fire. . . .

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historical records. I'll show you, presently. Mind you, this is important. Because the Aliens told their slave-race how to maintain the underground worlds. Gave them too much knowledge, perhaps, for they never expected revolt. And when the revolt came, the slaves died, as I told ye. But the records remain. Look."

UNDER Brekkir's blunt fingers a picture flashed upon the screen. Alan watched with less than half his mind. He could see only the Carcasillians, blind and helpless and deadly dangerous, marching on the Terasi.

But as the pictures changed on the screen he found himself watching involuntarily. The world's surface, smooth and lifeless, slid past in panorama. He saw gigantic ruins, like nothing man's world had ever known. He saw death and desolation everywhere.

Once, he caught a glimpse of the great abnormal asymmetries of the citadel lifting against a misty sky, and curiosity suddenly burned in his mind about what lay inside it, but he knew he would never learn that now.

And once he saw the flash of a deep gorge, bottomless, vertiginous, its far side hidden in fog. And far away along it a moving white wall that drew nearer. Alan thought of a flood bursting down a dry arroyo. But this chasm was immeasurably vast, and the flood was deluge. Prismatic rainbows veiled it. Boiling, crashing, and seething like a hundred Niagaras, now, the mighty tide swept toward them, brimming the chasm.

Alan felt a faint tremble shake the floor. Sir Colin nodded.

"The sea-bed—what's left of it. The moon's verra close now, and its drag is tremendous. In a million years, it's cut a gorge across the planet. This is all that remains of the ocean. It follows the moon around the earth."

"That thunder we heard when we first left the ship," Alan remembered. "That was it?"

"Aye. Watch."

Vision after vision shifted across the screen. Desolation, ruin. And yet there was life here. Gigantic worm-shapes slid through the mists, and once one of the flying half-human things drifted down the slopes of air above the tidal chasm.

"No intelligence," Sir Colin murmured, pointing. "They follow the water and eat weeds and fish. They are no longer human."

More scenes changing on the screen. Gray dust, gray death. . . . And then, unexpectedly, a forest—green, lovely, veiled in silvery fog. A shallow pool where a fish rose in a ring of widening ripples. A small brown animal raced out of the underbrush and fled beyond the scanner's range.

Alan leaned forward, suddenly sick with a passion of longing for the past he would never see again. Green earth, lost springtime of the world! He could not speak for a moment.

"It is the past," Sir Colin said gravely. "A part of history, but a history we never saw. Perhaps a thousand years ago, perhaps more. It is the planet Venus."

"The Aliens went there?"

"Aye. But they didna stay. No human life to feed them. They came back to earth and died here. But do ye na see it, Alan—Venus is habitable! Humans could live there!"

"A thousand years ago—"

"Or more—nothing in the life of a planet. We have records of the atmosphere on Venus, the elements, the water and food. Humans can live there, I tell ye, laddie! And now, perhaps will!" He lifted bony shoulders. "If what we hope is true. And if we live to prove it."

It was Karen who answered.

"The Aliens destroyed their space-ships, toward the end. Used up the metal for some other purpose, maybe, or maybe for the energy in them. For a long time the Terasi have known they could live on Venus if they had a ship and a power-source. Now there's a ship. The one that brought us here."

"Well, the ship's big enough to carry us all—Terasi too, I think. We could go to Venus and rebuild the race on a new world. *If* we had any power."

"It is a second chance for mankind," Sir Colin said gravely. "But—no power. No power in all the world. The Terasi checked that long ago. Only little scraps like those that keep these scanners going. Till I saw you, Alan, I had no idea that there might be a power-source left on earth."

"The fountain!" Alan said.

"Aye. The Terasi knew no Carcasillians until you came. They never guessed about the fountain. But there it is, and there must be a source to keep it burning. Enough to take a ship to Venus! That I know." Sir Colin struck a gnarled fist into his palm. "I have searched and studied here, and I'd stake my soul on that. If we could only take it out—power the ship with it!"

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"What is the source?"

"I dinna quite know. Radioactivity, perhaps, yet something more. The Aliens brought it with them from the stars, and it's a strange stuff. I know a little from charts the robot-humans left here. A glowing little nucleus that consumes itself slowly and sends out radiations. Will ye bet there isn't one of them under that fountain in Carcasilla?" His voice shook as he spoke.

"That fountain—the Carcasillians live by it," Alan reminded him slowly.

"Aye, a sterile life. They'll never rebuild civilization. But the Terasi, now—they're strong enough to face hardships on the new world. And they have fine minds. If we could get back to Carcasilla—we canna be sentimental about this, Alan, laddie. That may be the last power-source on earth, and we maun use it to save mankind."

Alan nodded without speaking. Yes, they must take it if they could. There was nothing the Carcasillians could do to prevent them. All over the city, that violet light dying, the fountain of life fading, the delicate folk who were made for toys tasting mortality at last—hunger and thirst and death. The bubble city shivering in the cold winds from outside, its floating castles shattered, its colors dimmed. And Evaya in *the gathering shadows—Evaya, with her eyes blank mirrors, through which the Light-Wearer stared!*

Alan said harshly, "All right. What's the plan?"

It was Karen who laughed. "The plan? Why, keep the gongs going while we can, until the Alien breaks through and gets us." Her voice was brittle.

Sir Colin said evenly, as if she had not spoken, "The plan would be to get back into Carcasilla, I suppose—now, while the people are gone—and try to find what lies beneath the fountain and see if we can use it."

Alan said suddenly, "Flande! Flande won't be gone! Flande's no fragile toy for the Light-Wearer to command. And the Carcasillians aren't quite as helpless as we thought, not while Flande's alive. He'll prevent our taking away the power source, if only for his own safety!"

"Aye, Flande," Sir Colin said heavily. "I'd forgotten him. Flande's a force I haven't reckoned with. He's too enigmatic to fit in anywhere until we know who he is, or what. But Karen's right, laddie." The big shoulders of the older man sagged.

"We've got another problem here and now," he said, then. He nodded toward the screen upon which the flutter of gossamer garments was passing. "They must be nearly here. The Alien's making his last bid, you know. He'll have something—"

The brazen note of a gong thundered out from the cavern below them, cutting off his words. The echoes spread shuddering through the whole great space of the cave, and another gong answered them, deeper-toned, vibrating. And then another. A diapason of quivering metal, like the striking of shields, rose and bellowed and rent the air within the cavern with a mighty crashing.

Mike's hand went to his gun. "This is it."

Brekkir sprang to the stairway. They followed him dizzily upward, around and around, until the sloping roof opened before them. Far below lay the machine-city and the cavern floor.

THE deafening vibrations of beaten metal roared out, echoing and re-echoing from the walls and the arched roof. Around them, on roof-tops, in the streets, knots of Terasi were gathered about heavy plates that gleamed like brass. Crude sledges swung and crashed with resounding force against the gongs.

Booming, roaring, bellowing, the Terasi thundered their defiance to the last of the living gods.

Brekkir pointed. In the cracks that split the cavern walls, figures stirred. Pale figures, gossamer-robed. The Carcasillians, clambering like hundreds of ants above them.

Mike jerked out his pistol and fired, but Karen struck down his arm.

"Hold it! Save 'em, Mike. We haven't got too much ammunition."

Mike looked at her, paling. Karen shrugged. Then she looked up quickly as a thin lance of light shot down from the distant cavern wall. It touched a platform nearby, where Terasi were swinging their measured blows heavily against the bronze plate.

The Terasi jumped aside, startled. But the ray did not seem to harm them. It went through their bodies like x-rays made visible. But on the surface of the metal it exploded in white fire. Broke there, and crawled, like a stain.

The Terasi lifted their hammers again and struck savagely. No vibrating thunder followed the blows. The gong clanked dully, like struck lead.

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Sir Colin grimaced.

"Heat-rays that don't harm living organisms," he said.

"What is it?" Karen asked.

"After a bell's been heated in a furnace, it won't vibrate. Same principle, I think. The Carcasillians can silence every gong here with those. See, there goes another. Now, where the Alien found such weapons, I'd give a lot to know."

"You won't know," Mike told him, with a faint echo of hysteria in his voice. "We'll never know. Look—another gong has gone!"

The worst thing, thought Alan, was the fact that the heat-rays did not harm human flesh. The Alien was saving his humans alive.

"And we can't *do* anything!" raged Karen, striking the rail before her with both hands. "We've even got to save our ammunition for the noise—or for each other."

The delicately colored carriers of doom were creeping closer now, ignoring the Terasi arrows. Now and then Alan saw one find its mark and a gossamer-robed denizen of the city that never knew death fell silently among the rocks. But the Carcasillians crept on, and long fingers of light went probing out before them, seeking and silencing the gongs. That tremendous swelling bellow of sound still rioted through the cavern, but just perceptibly it was lessening now. One gong, or two or three, made no real difference that could be measured. But the toll inevitably was mounting.

Helplessly Alan watched the fragile army advance. How incongruous it seemed, that these doll-like creatures could bring doom upon the savage Terasi, creeping down the walls in their floating garments, firing as they came. Evaya would be somewhere among them, fragile and lovely and blind. Unless an arrow had found her already....

(It had been like holding life itself in his arms, to hold that resilient steel-spring body, so delicate and so strong. He had been near to forgetting that latent strength in her, which would never matter to him now. He thought of the dizzy moment of their kiss, while the bubble city rocked below them. He must forget it now and forever—for whatever time in eternity remained.)

And he knew that this way of dying was perhaps as good as any, and easier than some. For now he would not have to watch Carcasilla shattered and ruined and dark.

Also, he knew, suddenly, as he heard the gongs falling silent one by one below him, that he would never have left Evaya in a dying Carcasilla while the Terasi set sail for the future, even if Flande had let them rob the fountain of its power. He knew he would have gone back to the ruined city and taken that fragile, resilient body in his arms and held her, waiting while the darkness closed around them both.

In the end, he knew now, they must have died together, one way or another. This was quicker and so perhaps it was easier.

He looked up and saw a pale shimmer far back in a chasm of the walls, and a hard shudder of revulsion shook him. Easier? Easier to die in the Light-Wearer's terrible embrace?

He watched it, fascinated, glimmering far back in the darkness, waiting and urging its puppets on.

The pale light lanced down from all around them. And the cavern was no longer bellowing with shaking sound. Here on the roof-top they had no need to shout to one another any more. Alan saw Karen take a firmer grip upon her gun, saw her shoulders square beneath the ragged blouse.

"Well, it won't be long now," she said grimly. "This is it, boys. Too bad—I'd have liked to see Venus."

THIS had happened before, Alan thought. And it had happened in his own lifetime—in the familiar world of the Twentieth Century, before an unguessable flood of years had swept him to the end of time. Below the sloping rooftop where they stood watching, the little army of the Terasi stood at bay, their bull thews and savagery useless now against the weapons that struck from far away, fingering out like swords of living light.

In the past such scenes had happened many times. In Tunisia, he remembered, at Bataan and Corregidor, wherever the armadas of sea and sky and land had met in conflict, such hopeless battles had been fought. But this, he thought, was the last battle of all.

These were civilization's last defenders—these brutish, iron-bodied men—and this little group of less than a hundred represented all that he had known of the world that was gone. The towers of metropolitan New York, the gray cathedrals of London, the white ramparts of Chicago lifting above the blue lake—these were the symbols of a race that built and aspired—a race that had gone down to defeat.

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All over the earth was darkness. Civilization's last sparks were being crushed out here, where mankind fought savagely and hopelessly in its last remaining fortress. The thunder of the brazen gongs was fading imperceptibly as the heat rays licked out to splash in white fire across them.

Alan glanced around at the tense little group on the rooftop. Sir Colin, a tattered, scarecrow figure squinting down at the battle with a look of cold, impartial, scientific interest on his face. Mike Smith, half-crouched, hand nervous on his gun, his quick eyes raking the walls where Carcasillians moved like gaily colored moths in the crevices. Mike was afraid. Not of the Carcasillians, not even of death—but of death in the embrace of the terrible shadowy thing that waited in the darkness, watching.

Karen—he had respected her even in the long-gone days when she had been in the German espionage, and he an American Army Intelligence officer fighting her with every weapon he knew. It seemed ludicrous now to think in those meaningless terms, but he realized suddenly that she had never been intrinsically a Nazi; she was an adventurer, playing for high stakes and ready to take the consequences if she failed. Yes, he could respect Karen. There was a suggestion of a grim smile on her face as she met his glance.

Alan did not think of Evaya. She was up there somewhere, a slim, fragile, steely creature who was no longer human. And she would accomplish her inhuman purpose very soon now, and the demon that possessed her would come sweeping into view, leaping like a hound to the kill, ravening with the hunger of a million years.

The arrows of the Terasi still lanced up toward their besiegers. Now and then a Carcasillian fell, gossamer garments streaming, to death on the rocks below. And death was so new, so strange to these toy-like immortals from an immortal city led by the fountain of life! The city fed by—power!

And power would save the Terasi—if they could reach it. If it were not as hopelessly far way as power on another planet.

Save them? Would it?

What was it Sir Colin had said about great mechanical gongs, built by the rebel race to fight the Light-Wearers? Alan reached out suddenly and gripped the Scotsman's shoulder.

"Those gongs," he said in an urgent voice. "The big ones. Where were they?"

Sir Colin gave him an abstracted glance. "Inside the machine towers. Some of them underground. Why? They were power-driven, remember. You can't—"

Alan struck the parapet triumphantly. "If we had the power, then, the heatbeam couldn't reach 'em! Sir Colin, I'm going to get you the power!"

The Scotsman's face came alive, but with a startled distrust that surprised Alan.

"Anyhow, I'm going to try. We can't be worse off than we are right now. The gateway to Carcasilla's open now—you saw that in the scanner—and nobody's left there but Flande. There must be a way back from here that wouldn't lead through the Carcasillians. Tell me what to look for and I'll try the fountain."

The distrust on Sir Colin's gaunt face had changed to a desperate sort of hope. "You're right, laddie. It's worth a try—by God, it is! But we'll have to hurry."

"We?"

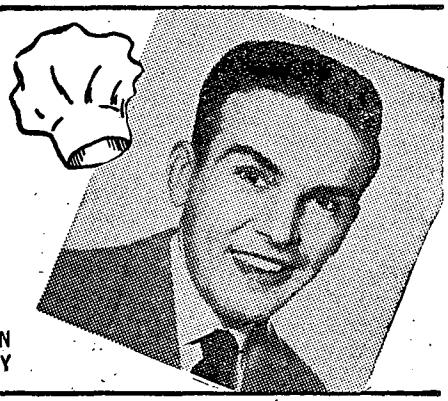
"I'm going, too."

Mike shouldered forward, sweat shining on his bronzed cheeks. "So am I."

Sir Colin frowned. "Your gun's needed here, Mike."

"The hell with that! I'm not going to

MICHIGAN BAKER IS SLOW TAKER!



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stay. That—that *thing*—" He broke off, showing the whites of his eyes as he glanced up at the crevice where a pale shimmer flickered now and then as the Alien urged its puppet army on.

"There's no assurance we may not meet it ourselves," Sir Colin said dryly. "Still—Karen?"

"I'm staying. I can help here. Fighting's one thing I know a little about."

"Good lass." The Scotsman touched her shoulder lightly.

Brekkir, watching their sudden animation in bewilderment, grunted something that only Sir Colin understood. They spoke together in gutturals. When the scientist turned back to Alan his ruddy face was alight with new enthusiasm.

"Brekkir says there are ways out, if we're reckless enough to leave the noise of the gongs. He'll find us a lead box, too. We'll need something to carry that—that dynamite-pill without the radiation destroying us all. What the thing is the good God knows, but I suspect something like radioatomic energy—perhaps a uranium isotope. . . . Aye, it's a risk, lads, but think what it means if we win!"

The timeless current that flowed whispering along the Way of the Gods swept them weightlessly toward Carcasilla. They talked little, in hushed voices, as they drifted through the dimness. Alan thought of Karen, pale under the tousled red curls, saying good-by at the tunnel entrance. They might never meet again. He thought of Evaya, moving like a soft-winged moth against the craggy walls, blind and terrible, raking the Terasi village with a beam of death. He thought of the way light kindled behind her exquisite features when she smiled, like an ivory lantern suddenly glowing. He thought of the springing resilience of her body in his arms. And he knew that there was no risk too great to face if it might mean her awakening.

"*I'll come back,*" he thought grimly.

And then he remembered that if he did come back it meant the end of Carcasilla and Evaya's death. So he stopped thinking at all, and gave himself up to watching the violet circle of light that was Carcasilla's open gateway grow larger and larger and larger up the tunnel before them.

They were stumbling over the broken pavement toward it, beyond the sweep of the air-flow, when Alan was briefly aware of a sudden rocking of the world around him. Values shifted imponderably; he was not himself any more, and these men beside him—these tiny, nameless creatures. . . . He must have made some hoarse, inarticulate sound, for Sir Colin's hands were suddenly heavy on his shoulders.

"Alan! Laddie! Wake up!"

Everything turned right side up again with a sickening dizziness. In the dimness Alan blinked at the scientist.

"You're all right now, aren't ye, laddie? Answer me!"

"Yeah," Alan muttered, his tongue feeling numb. "It—caught me by surprise. Gone now. I—" He glanced back along the tunnel. Nothing. . . . Or was that a flicker of light, far away, almost invisible? Light that was somehow darkness, dark that blazed with supernal brilliance? It was gone as he looked. "I can fight it," he said. "Don't worry. We know I can throw it off if you help me. But for God's sake let's hurry!"

And so, with Sir Colin on one side gripping his arm, and Mike on the other breathing heavily and fingering his gun as he shot ugly glances sidewise, Alan came back into Carcasilla.

The bubble palaces, the flying avenues still hung like colored clouds in the air, but they were empty and silent now. It was strangely like homecoming to Alan Drake. He knew each spiraling ramp so well, each cluster of floating globes. And nostalgia struck him hard with a double impact—once for the lost Evaya with whom he had walked these airy ways, and once for the ruin he must visit upon this lovely city if he succeeded in his mission here.

CHAPTER V

THE ALIEN'S EMBRACE

DIRECTLY before them loomed the great statue of the Light-Wearer, enigmatic, robed in blinding brilliance. One thing that he saw beyond it brought a cold thrill of foreboding. A soaring crystal bridge that spanned an arch above the statue was shattered halfway across its curve, as though the hammer of Thor had smashed ruthlessly down on Bifrost. Sir Colin's gunfire! That was it! The bullet or the concussion must have shattered that vibrant arch.

Silence brimmed Carcasilla like a cup. Before them through the bubble domes the violet fire of the fountain rose in cool brilliance toward the mists of the cavern roof. And under the fountain—power. Power to drive back the Enemy and save

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the last indomitable remnants of civilized mankind!

"What's that over there?" Sir Colin asked in a puzzled voice. "Flande's tower, but—"

Alan knew where to look for that pinnacle of running rain poised incredibly on its spiral of stairs like waterfalls. He squinted through the clustering domes.

The tower was not there. A cone of light flamed in its place. Lambent radiance like moonlight.

"The gateway when we first entered Carcasilla," Sir Colin rumbled. "Remember?"

Alan had a brief, poignant recollection of Evaya's slim Artemis body silhouetted against the golden disc that had shut out the following Alien.

"It can't pass those shields of light," he said aloud. "Flande's built himself a barrier somehow, out of the same stuff."

Sir Colin jerked his head in agreement. "Guid enough. As long as he's shut up there, he won't be troubling us. Now the fountain—is this the shortest way, laddie?"

"That green street, I think, between the purple globes. Here, I'll show you."

They went up the winding avenue in a silence so deep that their footsteps sounded abnormally loud. Instinct made them keep their voices hushed as they wound along through the airy labyrinths aglow with delicate color. And the color, curiously, seemed to vibrate until Alan's eyes could scarcely make out the way. What he could see looked wrong.

Mike said, "We're taking a hell of a long time to get there, seems to me," and shot a wary glance across his shoulder. All of them had been doing that. Alan muttered some reassurance that did not sound very confident even to himself as he led them up an undulating boulevard through rings of floating spheres. Behind him, formless and intangible, he could feel the shadow of menace shaping itself like fog rolling together.

The blinding vibration of color clouded his eyes. They were striding faster now up the undulant street, almost running.

Vision suddenly cleared before Alan's eyes. At their feet the city dropped away, spread out below Flande's tower! He stood with Mike and Sir Colin at the foot of that cone of light which veiled the tower of rain. But he *knew* he had been leading them straight toward the fountain. . . .

Low laughter shook through their minds. Flande's laughter. Words were forming there, but before Flande could shape an intelligible thought in their brains, Mike choked on a shout and flung up a pointing arm. Alan turned to look.

The image of the Light-Wearer still blazed against the opened Gateway. But something was wrong. There were *two* figures now—and one of them was no statue.

Blinding in its darkness and its light, tall as the fountain itself—the Alien stood in the threshold of Carcasilla.

Then it leaned forward and leaped toward them with gigantic strides. It moved with such dazzling speed that Alan could not even try to focus its inhuman image. A paralysis of terror held them motionless on the platform. Nearer it came, and nearer, covering incredible distances with each soaring stride.

And then like a shroud dropping noiselessly around them, a dark curtain shut out Carcasilla.

In the sightless blackness Sir Colin's voice said levelly, "It's Flande, I think. He's saved us—for the moment. Wait."

The scrape of flint-and-wheel sounded, and a wavering point of fire sprang into life on the Terasi device he carried. In its yellow flare they could see what looked like a wall of water rushing soundlessly down just before them—the surface of Flande's tower. Alan found his voice, surprised that it was steady.

"That's it, all right. It can't get at us now."

"You're sure?" Mike Smith's voice shook. It was infinitely harder for him to admit defeat than for the others. His tough integrity was crumbling almost before their eyes.

Alan turned toward the wall of rain, and said, "Flande, Flande!"

In response a luminous slit began to glow in the wall. The veils of water parted slowly. Light shone out through a swirl of rainbow mists, dissipating the dark in which they stood.

Then Flande's face, immense, god-like, hung suspended in the great oval. Through his endless vistas of memory Flande looked out at them again, young-old, immortal, infinitely weary. And yet Alan thought he sensed a change. Beneath that passionless coldness pulsed something new, something vital, like . . . Alan thought: *Fear. It's fear.*

WITHIN their minds Flande's telepathic voice rustled like leaves in a soft wind.

"The Light-Wearer cannot break through. You are safe here."

"You—saved us?" Alan asked incredulously. "But—"

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Mike broke in. "How the hell did you get us here, anyway?" His voice was belligerent. Flande had humiliated Mike once before, and the memory of it thickened his anger now.

Flande's remote, impersonal gaze touched the gunman.

"Hypnotics, of course, fool."

"Of course," Sir Colin echoed, tilting his head back until the red beard jutted as he looked into Flande's face searchingly. "The question is—why? Ye weren't so friendly the last time we met."

"It is for me to question—not you," Flande told him austerely. "Answer this—has the Light-Wearer fed yet?"

A broad grin cracked Sir Colin's bearded face.

"Och, that tears it!" he said. "So that's why ye saved us, eh? So we wouldn't be food for the Alien? Yes, I'm beginning to understand. The Alien can't harm the Carcasillians, but he can harm *you,* or you'd not protect yourself like this. Ye've been hiding here."

Alan half expected the flaming sword of radiance to flash, but it did not come. Flande looked down in quiet silence. After a long while he said, "All that is true enough. But we are both food for the Light-Wearer, and you will do well to treat me with respect."

"Is it still there?"

Flande paused, his eyes going unfocused with a look of inward searching. Then: "No. It is leaving now. It goes back along the Way. It knows it cannot penetrate this veil. . . ."

His voice in their minds trailed off. And then he shot a sudden question at them with the impact of a shout: "Why did you come back?"

"To ask your help," Sir Colin answered, quickly and smoothly. "To join forces in fighting the Alien."

"You lie," Flande said in a cold voice. "When you lie, I know it. Furthermore, the Light-Wearer cannot be destroyed. Surely you realize that."

"You're wrong," Sir Colin flashed back, as though he were correcting a recalcitrant student. "The basic laws of physics and biology must apply to everything on this planet, and life, being energy, is subject at least to entropy—by which I mean the Alien *cannot* be invulnerable. It fears sound, anyway."

"You hope to conquer it with noise?" Flande's voice was contemptuous.

"We've held it at bay with noise, at any rate."

Flande's brows lifted. "Indeed? Tell me about it."

Sir Colin hesitated. "No harm in that," he said at last. "If we're to join forces I suppose ye'll have to know what's happened. Here it is."

Quickly and concisely he recounted what had been taking place in the cavern of the Terasi. When Sir Colin had finished, Flande's face hung motionless, the lids lowered. Then with surprising suddenness the lids rose and a furious blaze of anger lighted the eyes beneath.

"So!" Flande's voice burned in their minds. "You will lie to me, will you? Stupid human fools! Did you think I was not aware that you were heading toward the fountain when you reentered Carcasilla? All I needed was the knowledge of where you'd been—and now I know. You come from the cavern of the great machines, useless for want of power. You come back to the only source of power left along the Way of the Gods. You even carry a box of lead. Do you think I need ask why?"

Sir Colin shrugged as the thunderous anger beat away to silence in their brains.

"So now ye know. What next?"

Cool detachment dropped once more over Flande's angry face. The lids drooped.

"I need not gamble. Here in my tower I can wait until the Light-Wearer starves."

Alan gave a harsh bark of laughter. "You'll have a long wait. It'll reach the Terasi soon, and there are nearly a hundred of them."

"No matter. I can sleep. When I waken it will be another century, and the Light-Wearer will be dead."

"Maybe," Alan said. "Maybe not. You won't be able to get to the fountain. Without that you'll die."

"No, I shall be in catalepsy; my body will need no fuel. By the time I waken only the Carcasillians will be left alive."

"Your shield here—won't that fail if you go into catalepsy?" Sir Colin asked.

"My shield is the power of the mind," Flande said, with a touch of pride. "As for you—"

"Yes, what about us?" Mike Smith's voice was rough with tension.

"You must stay, too," Flande went on as if Mike had not spoken. "Stay and die, I suppose. If I left you free, you might find some way to rob the fountain. And certainly you would go to feed the Light-Wearer, and thus postpone still further the hour of my awakening. No, you must stay. But your death will be easy. I shall put my sleep upon you."

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A ribbon of silver fire flashed out above them. It coiled like a snake, winding into a net of intricate fiery patterns. They glowed on Alan's retina, burning deeper and deeper, into his very brain. He could not wrench his gaze away.

Sir Colin whispered hoarsely, "Hypnotism! Dinna look at it, Alan—Mike—"

The ribbon of fire coiled on. Mike's breathing grew thick. There was no other sound. Sir Colin's hands fell away. . . .

THERE was nothing in the world but that serpentine silvery ribbon, writhing into shapes of arabesque brilliance. Symbols—words in no known language. Alan could almost read their meaning. But not quite. It was the language of dream.

Hot agony seared his shoulder. With slow reluctance he retraced the steps back toward consciousness. The burning pain was relentless. It dragged him back. And now he could move again. His gaze jerked downward to the taper lying at his feet, its wick fading into a coal. Its burning had broken the spell.

When he looked up again the silver ribbon was gone. And except for that dying coal the darkness around him was complete. Flande had closed his door, retreated into the slumber that would last a hundred years.

He heard hoarse breathing at his feet. He stooped. Mike and Sir Colin lay motionless in the grip of hypnotic sleep that would end only in the deeper sleep of death. He shook them hopelessly.

Alan straightened in the darkness, facing the unseen wall through which Flande's passionless face had pronounced doom upon the race of man. If he could waken Flande, perhaps the barrier around the tower might fall. And if the Light-Wearer swooped through to devour them all—well, the Light-Wearer was winning anyhow, and even that was preferable to death without hope.

How had Evaya summoned Flande, long ago? Alan stepped forward in the darkness, arms outstretched. Three steps and then the cool surface of the wall met his hands. He pressed. Nothing happened. He shifted his hands and pressed again. Still nothing. Did it work only when Flande willed it? He moved his hands once more.

A tiny slit of light glowed in the dark, spindle-shaped, expanding like a cat's pupil. Rainbow mists were curdled beyond it. And beyond them hung the face of Flande, immense, immortal, eyes closed in a slumber like death.

Alan's full-lidded eyes had narrowed to shining slits. There might be sorcery inside this tower—but death was coming to meet it.

He stepped through the colored mists and into Flande's doorway.

The great face still hung before him, its eyes asleep. But the force of gravity had shifted strangely. He thought the floor was no longer underfoot, that he was dropping faster and faster toward that silent, enigmatic, gigantic face hanging in the gray air. The mists, he saw without surprise, were gray, too, now, and thick between him and Flande. And drowsiness was mounting about him as though he breasted a rising tide. The sands of sleep, too light to fall, hung in suspension inside Flande's tower.

He stood at the threshold of the Face. It loomed like a cliff above him. He struggled forward, heavy-limbed, against the tide of sleep—and stepped through the illusion of the face.

Beyond it was grayness again, and sleep that beat at him with great, soft, stunning blows—like bludgeons of cloud. . . . Another step forward, and another—remembering Evaya—

There was no face. Perhaps there was no Flande? There was nothing at all but sleep.

His knee struck something resilient and soft. Moving in a dream, he leaned over, and with an incredible precision that could happen only in dreams, found his hands fitting themselves about a throat.

The hands tightened.

Violet light pouring down around him wakened Alan from a dream in which he knelt with one knee upon a yielding couch and strangled a being who lay there. The mists of sleep were fading from his brain. He blinked. He stood in a great peaked tent of rain. Its soundless torrents poured down all around him along the walls, translucent, with the violet day of Carcasilla glowing through.

Then the barrier was gone!

He looked down. And he knew it was no dream. This was Flande's face purpling upon the couch, the same face that had hung in gigantic illusion in the doorway. But a man's face, a man's perfect, deathly white body stretched upon the couch. Flande's eyes looked up into his, wide, shocked into wakefulness, still veiled a little behind the memories of infinite time. But the layers of withdrawal were fading swiftly now, as ice cracks and melts, and Flande was lost no longer in the memories

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of his thousand years. It was no god whose throat Alan gripped—but a strangling man.

Flande's face was blackening with congested blood, red veins lacing the whites of his staring eyes. He would be dead in another second unless—

Alan let him drop back on his cushions. Flande lay still for a moment, coughing and choking, pawing his throat with soft, pale hands. He was, Alan saw now, neither Carcasillian nor Terasi. Perhaps his race had died millenniums ago in some little world along the Way of the Gods. His body was symmetrical as a Belvedere—but soft, incredibly soft. Alan thought he knew why. A thousand years of inactivity, of stasis—Flande's muscles must have changed to water!

A sound beyond made him turn. The curtains of rain still swayed apart to show Carcasilla through the opening. Sir Colin was clambering in now, a little dizzily. Behind him peered Mike Smith.

"The Alien?" Alan asked swiftly.

Sir Colin shook his head. His voice was thick. "I looked. Nothing—yet."

Alan told him what had happened, watching his keen little eyes rake the interior of the tower even as he listened. Wakefulness was making his bearded face alert again by the time Alan had finished.

"So—" murmured Sir Colin, with a sharp glance at the still coughing Flande. "He's no such a god now, eh? And this place of his empty. I wonder. . . ." He moved across a floor like still, depthless water, to examine the farther wall. Mike followed him uneasily.

Flande's coughing lessened. He was sitting up, now, on the couch. His eyes, fixed on the doorway and on Carcasilla beyond, were wide and filled with terror. He saw that the barrier was down.

"Stop him!" Sir Colin's hoarse cry echoed from the walls of rain. Alan leaped forward, but his leap was a fraction of a second behind Flande's. The soft body hurtling against his shoulder spun him off balance and he saw only a pale flash as the deposed godling shot by him toward the door. Mike Smith whirled, a grin of savage pleasure on his lips, and dived for the flying figure. His hand grazed Flande's ankle; then he was stretched face down on the smooth pool of the floor, mouthing deep curses. Flabby Flande might be, but he could run!

Mike scrambled up. The three of them jammed for a moment in the doorway. Then Mike broke through and sprang down the waterfall steps, tugging at his gun.

"Don't shoot!" Sir Colin called. "We need him!"

THEN they had no more breath to call. The spiral steps seemed to whirl underfoot as Alan followed the scientist's flying heels. When they reached the level Flande was far ahead, a pale figure flashing among the crystalline buildings, Mike's dark bulk pounding in pursuit.

The chase led along the rim of an abyss that dropped away to swimming distances. Sir Colin's age began to tell before they had run a hundred steps. Falling behind, he motioned Alan on.

Alan, rounding the edge of a great egg-shaped dome, saw that Flande was heading for the fountain. From here they could see it gushing up out of its basin, a great pillar of violet fire. Flande and Mike, dodging among the buildings below them, were drawing nearer and nearer to the wall of glassy multicolors above which the basin loomed.

Flande reached the wall. Alan could see the flash of his terrified white face as he worked frantically at the wall. Mike Smith plunged toward him, head down. Then suddenly there was an arched opening twenty feet high gaping in the wall. Across its threshold stole a faint, quiet light that had in it something of the fountain's radiance. Alan could not see what lay inside.

He heard a thin, high-pitched wail of despair and looked up to see Mike hurling himself forward at Flande, hands clawing out. Briefly their bodies struggled. Then Alan saw that Mike had the demigod by one arm, twisting it viciously, a savage light of triumph on his face. He said something Alan could not hear.

"Easy, Mike," he called, hurrying down the last stretch of blue ramp toward them. "You'll break his arm."

"Yeah, that's right!" Mike grinned fiercely at him over one shoulder. "What about it?"

Flande, on his knees, was beating unavailingly against his captor's hand, a stark, unreasoning horror in his eyes—fear, thought Alan, that did not involve Mike Smith. Instinctively, he glanced back toward the Gateway, but its great circle stood empty in the wall.

Sir Colin came panting down the ramp.

"Mike!" he snapped. "Ye'll have the mon fainting on us! Ease up now, like a guid laddie."

Reluctantly Mike obeyed. He hoisted

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Flande to his feet, but kept a tight grip on the flabby wrist. He said contemptuously, "I could kill him with one hand."

"No need now," Alan said, with a queer conviction that he spoke the truth. "Flande can't use his magic. Hell, he isn't even using telepathy!"

It was true. Flande was pouring out frantic syllables in the trilling, birdlike tongue of Carcasilla. There was no trace of that vast calm on his face now; the demigod had collapsed with a vengeance, leaving only a very terrified man in his place. It was hard to believe that the giant visage which had awed them so in the doorway had any connection with this babbling creature in Mike's grip.

"Let me go!" he was crying now. "Quick! Quick, before it comes!"

"Calm down," Alan said. "It isn't here now. Maybe—"

"It will come! It knows the force-shell is gone. It will come swiftly now!"

Alan said, "What's beyond there!" and nodded toward the archway behind Flande.

The demigod averted his face stubbornly, not answering. Mike twisted his captive's arm ruthlessly. Alan said nothing. This was no time for half-measures; anything was justified that gained an answer which might help them.

After a moment Flande cried out shrilly, "Stop him! Make him stop! I can't stand this—"

"What's inside the arch?"

"The—the power-source. I swear it! Now free me!"

"Why?"

Flande licked dry lips. "Look," he said abruptly. "If I tell you this, if I save you from the Light-Wearer, will you free me? Otherwise, we die together here, when it comes."

"All right," Alan said. "What's the answer?"

"Let's go inside—"

"We're staying right here until you talk." An unpleasant chill was crawling down Alan's back at the thought of the Light-Wearer flashing toward them along the Way of the Gods. But he dared make no concession to Flande. He nodded at Mike, who applied a little more pressure. Flande cried out.

"I'll tell you! But we must be quick. *It*—"

"What's inside?"

"The power-source that gave me my magic," Flande said, talking fast. "I came to it long ago, when I first found Carcasilla. This place is forbidden. None of them dare enter. But I dared, and I saw the birthplace of the fountain." His voice changed timbre a little. "I saw the Source. You've bathed in the fountain—you know what it can do. It healed you when you were dying; it gave you immortality. But *I* have seen the Source! *I* have stood at the outer edge of its radiance and bathed in the terrible glory of that power. . . ." His voice trailed away. Then he said simply, "It made me a god."

"How?" Alan demanded curtly.

Flande gave him a burning look. "How could you understand? I have stood closer than any human creature ever dared stand to the heart and the source of immortality. Here in my body and my brain there dwells something of that same power now. The brain of man has many secret chambers—their locks flew open before the impact of that force and I knew—I saw—" Again his voice died. Then, wearily, "But I am drained now. Building the force-shell was harder than I knew. Now I must bathe again, to replenish the power. Let me go—let me go, and I will build the shield around us all."

"What's he saying?" Mike asked impatiently.

Alan told them in quick sentences.

"The Source is down there, all right," he finished. "But it sounds like something too dangerous to tackle. If the mere radiation of the outer edges did that to Flande, what actual contact with the thing itself would do I—"

Flande's flat, thin scream broke off the sentence. Their eyes followed his shaking finger.

At the top of the long slope, against the background of the city and of Flande's pale tower of rain, something moved. A formless shape of shadow and blinding radiance, impossibly tall, and horribly graceful in its swift, stooping motion. Eyelessly it watched them.

MIKE'S reaction was shocking. He seemed to fall in upon himself, like an old man; a palsy of terror shook him, and the bronze face relaxed into a mask of imbecile fear.

Flande's thin squeak roused them from their paralysis. He twisted free from Mike's flaccid grip and spun toward the tunnel behind them, moving fast.

The motion had an almost hypnotic effect on Mike as he whirled away from the terror above them. Here was a soft, frightened, fleeing thing—a thing that had offended the man's pride and must be pun-

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ished. Mike redeemed his terror of a moment ago in headlong pursuit of this creature which feared him. He flung himself after Flande with a hoarse shout.

Some premonition of what Mike intended galvanized Alan into action as he saw the Nazi's first forward stride. Flande must not die yet. Alan hurled himself against Mike Smith's shoulder with all his weight, sending the Nazi staggering. Before Mike could recover, Alan was sprinting down the tunnel after Flande.

The tunnel slanted sharply down. Flande was a flying white shape outlined against golden brilliance as he plunged down the slope. Alan could hear the pounding feet of the others behind him and for an instant wondered horribly if he could hear the Alien's footsteps, too, as it ran upon its nameless limbs.

To flee from a thing that could move with the Alien's flashing strides was worse than futile—yet they ran. And except for Mike, perhaps, they ran more from the Alien itself than in pursuit of Flande.

Then Alan came within sight of what lay at the tunnel's foot, and for a moment all memory even of the terror behind was washed away. For a great room opened before him, brimming and blinding with a radiance he could not face. The eye could not measure the room's size, for distance was warped and distorted here by the light that glowed in great rippling beats—from the Source.

Pure light had poured into these walls so long that even the rocks glowed now, translucent, permeated through and through with the strength of that golden violence. The walls were windows opening upon glowing distance; they were mirrors that gave back and refracted the light upon its Source. The whole room swam with it, so that Flande's white figure, forging desperately ahead, seemed to advance against great waves of brilliance that beat *through* him as he ran.

In the center of the room a corona of light danced around the dazzling glory of the Source. Directly above it a circle of darkness drank in the swirling tides of energy. The fountain, then, must rise directly above this pool.

Toward it Flande was plunging, against intangible waves he had to fight like waves of strong wind. But he had slowed his pace.

He was glancing over one shoulder, now, at his pursuers, at the tunnel beyond which the Alien must still be hovering. Now he had reached the outer circle of the corona and he paused there, hesitating between the danger behind him and the burning danger ahead. Farther than this he had never dared to go.

Alan paused, too. The light was blinding, and he was not eager to come any nearer to that boiling heart of energy at which he could scarcely bear to look directly. Silent tongues of pure golden fire leaped out around it, and the room swam with the power of the Source.

Flande stood hesitating in that bath of flowing radiance. And Alan thought that a change was coming over the demigod's face. A strange deepening of his eyes, as if godhood were distilling in his brain from the Source that burned beyond him.

Mike's hoarse shout behind him broke the spell. Alan heard Sir Colin cry out something unintelligible in the rolling echoes that woke along the cavern walls as Mike plunged shouting past him, brushing Alan to one side with his momentum, blind to everything except the presence of his quarry.

Alan's own voice rose in a useless cry, mingling with the echoes that rolled from the radiant mirrors of the walls. Mike hurtled past him, head down, a black bulk in the cavern of luminous sunlight. In silhouette Alan saw him stretch out both hands in unseeing, heedless triumph.

Flande screamed, his voice strangely deeper and more resonant. There was a thud of body striking hard against body. Alan, squinting against the brilliance, could see them toppling, locked in an embrace of rage and terror, while the silent flood of sun-rays breathed rippling past them.

They fell together, Flande and Mike Smith, into the heart of the boiling maelstrom that was the Source.

For the beat of a second Alan could see them standing there together, still locked in that furious grip, while the pure, pale violence of the flame burned blindingly through their bodies. They were shadows against that light. Shadows that ceased. The light barely flickered. Its serene waves beat out from that heart of fire.

And Alan stood alone in the golden cavern. . . .

SIR COLIN'S heavy footsteps hurrying down the ramp broke the trance a little and Alan turned an unseeing face toward him. His mind was still too stunned to accept what had just happened. He stood in dumb incredulity, seeing the blaze burn on, radiant and powerful.

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"God!" breathed Sir Colin softly. His face was drained of color. He must have seen enough to understand what had happened.

Then something flickered beyond Sir Colin's head, and Alan stirred a little in his daze. He could look up the length of the tunnel from here, seeing a circle of Carcasilla framed in the opening, Flande's tower shining in its center. And he could see something else—something that shimmered and swirled like blindness at the tunnel's threshold.

"Sir Colin," he said, in a voice that did not sound like his own. "Sir Colin! The—the Alien's come!"

The Scotsman's eyes shifted blankly from the Source's blaze to meet Alan's look. The bony shoulders moved in a shiver, and Sir Colin drew a long, shaken breath.

"Ah-h," he said, and his voice was strange, too. "The Alien. And we canna run any farther now. Mike may ha' been luckier than we." He turned. "Aye, I see it. But look, laddie! It isna' comin' in! I wonder—"

Alan looked, steeling himself to face the sight of that robed and terrible shape. It stood hesitating in the tunnel mouth, moving forward a little, then moving back, almost as if it were afraid.

"Could it be the Source it fears?" Sir Colin wondered aloud. "I doubt it. The Aliens themselves must ha' brought the Source here. I'd say it's much more dangerous to us than to—It. Poor Mike—"

"Forget about Mike now," Alan said shortly. "Later we can think about that. Now—"

"Ye're right, laddie." Sir Colin's shoulders squared. His voice was coming alive again, now that he had a problem to solve—and solve quickly. "There must be a reason it's hesitating—there must! But I canna think it's the Source. Och, if I only had more time! That Source! With it, I think we could defy even the Alien, there. But we'll need shields and tools. That thing in the fire's too much for the like of us, barehanded. There's a core of something in that basin. God, if we had the time! But that *thing* out there—"

"It's coming," Alan told him in a level voice, looking up. The tall shimmer of blindness was stooping down the passage toward them now. Hesitating, peering at them without eyes, retreating a pace or two—then coming on with that terrible, unearthly grace to devour them.

"It's afraid," Sir Colin said behind him in a quiet voice. "Something about us worries it. Now what? *What?*"

There was something in that calm question that made Alan rally even in this moment of hopelessness. How great a man this was, who could speak so coolly while death marched down upon him! Sir Colin, knowing himself the helpless prey of a being that had already wiped earth nearly clean of human life, could reason quietly as he watched death come stooping down the tunnel toward him.

"It's weakened, you know," Sir Colin

IN THE NEXT ISSUE

POLARIS AND THE GODDESS GLORIAN

By Charles B. Stilson

Not yet in the stars of Polaris was there charted a homeward voyage, as he had thought when the cruiser *Minnetonka* sailed away from mystic Sardanes. For there beckoned from the waves a weird Golden Man, calling the intrepid son of the snows from his first chosen course, to an incredibly ancient country, and into the strange thralldom of a woman—or was she goddess?—Glorian of Ruthar. . . .

This great novel by the author of "Polaris—of the Snows" and "Minos of Sardanes" will be on the newsstands in the September issue, on sale July 26.

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murmured, squinting up at the shimmer in the tunnel. "It's starving. Perhaps it's weaker than we think. It's growing more desperate—and yet warier, at the same time. Now what—why—"

"Got it!" said Alan, and sudden hope made his voice shake. "The gun! The noise! Don't you remember?"

"It's afraid of sound, aye. But what good will—"

"This cavern isn't so big. Fire a gun here and—you think it can reason that well? Does it know what echoes gunfire would raise? I know how it drew back and vibrated and waited when you fired at it by the gateway."

Sir Colin's eyes were squinted under the tufted red brows. "I'm getting it. The Alien's a thing of energy, a matrix of electronic forces, perhaps, held in a certain rigid balance. Vibration upsets the balance. Aye—the concussion of gunfire might hurt the thing enough. But it'll only run back and wait for us at the tunnel mouth, where the echoes wouldn't be so loud."

"You think the concussion might actually disable it, if we could hold it here in the tunnel?"

"There's a chance, laddie. The thing's afraid of something. It may be that. But we canna hold it. I've thought of everything under the sun—" He laughed. "I've even thought of bathing in the corona back there and turning demigod like Flande. But Flande was domned afraid o' the Alien, too, ye'll remember. So that's no help, except—" He looked down at his gun.

"I can hold the Alien," Alan said. He spoke so softly that he had to repeat it before Sir Colin heard. Then the keen little eyes under the red brows pierced at him like needles. The Scotsman shook his head slowly, lips compressed. "Ye canna mean that, laddie. The Source and the fire are a better choice than that. Or—" He glance down again at his gun.

"It's a chance," Alan said stubbornly. "It's worth the risk. We can't lose more than our lives. I'd rather burn like Mike and Flande, if there were no hope. But there is! Listen now. The thing out there's dying of hunger. Give a starving man food and he'll hang onto it even if you use a whip on him. I saw that done once, in the Sahara, by Bedouins. And—well, this time I'm the entree. The whole damned course. But the Alien will have to pay for what he gets!"

"No, laddie. No!"

"Don't forget, the Alien's been in my mind before. I fought him off, with your help. Maybe we can do it again. Don't argue. Get your gun out!" He spun toward the passage where that shape of terror burned white and black, wavering toward them in its blindness. "This is it!" Alan said. "I'll be right back. Get ready!"

He ran up the tunnel with long, easy paces—not giving himself time to think. Feeling was frozen in him now and must remain frozen until—until the Alien was destroyed.

The thing towering up the tunnel before him stooped, suddenly, in his direction, a shape of blindness he could not focus upon. Blinding light and blinding dark, breathing out hunger in monstrous, tangible waves. It moved one long stride forward, its robes of light and darkness swirling against its limbs.

Alan did not even see it move as it cleared the space between them. One second it was stooping toward him, tall against the outlines of Carcasilla. Then in an avid leap it seemed to grow to gargantuan size, hovering above him, folding down in a canopy of blindness.

Smothering, in an embrace so engulfing that he could not see nor feel nor think, there was awareness of those terrible gutting fingers that thrust down into his mind and soul, shaking with eagerness in their ravenous need.

And he knew in that moment that he was lost.

CHAPTER VI

HEIRS OF THE SHATTERED CITADEL

SUCH power swirled and slavered around Alan as he had never dreamed existed. The Alien had not exerted its full strength in their meeting by the gateway. It was a strength as great in its way as the sun-blaze of the fountain's source, and he could not hope to match it with any power he possessed. This was a being from beyond the stars, a being whose race had swept man like vermin from the earth. Fighting it was like defying the lightning.

He could not do it. He had misjudged himself and his adversary, and he was lost. Sir Colin was lost, and the Terasi, and all mankind. The consuming blaze of the Source would have been an easier way to die. Or Sir Colin's gun.

Crashing thunder bellowed all around him. Gunfire doubled and redoubled in echoes that rolled along the walls. And the Alien, shaken by the impact, relaxed its

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thrusting fingers for an instant. Briefly, sight returned to Alan. He felt a shudder go rippling through the force that held him. For a timeless moment as he felt it withdraw, he watched emotionlessly the course of Sir Colin's bullet. A soaring bridge crashed tingling into ruins. A bubble dome flew into rainbow fragments. And he saw the stairway spiraling upward toward Flande's tower spring into sudden vibration that shook the whole precarious structure until it blurred. Distant sound of it rang thinly in his ears. He saw the spiral shatter as slowly as a dream, saw the great streaming tower begin to topple.

Blindness closed down on him again, in one monstrous swooping rush. And there was anger in the violence now—a cold, iron anger as inhuman as the stars, as if the Alien understood what had happened, and why.

Hopelessly Alan stiffened against the force of the ravenous desire that whirled to a focus upon him again, boring down into his consciousness with irresistible fingers. In the one corner of his mind that was still his own, he remembered that he must somehow drag this cyclone of terrible power back down the tunnel. A man dragging a typhoon would be no less impossible. Even if that man had the full power of his own will—and Alan's will was going.

He could feel it falter. And dimly, from a source without, as if he were two awarenesses at once, he could feel curiously strengthened. It was as if a hollow within him had begun to fill.

Rage shook him—a curious, icy, inhuman rage, its cold flame turned upon the little human creatures who were fighting to deny their meaningless lives that had no purpose except to fill his need. *His* need. *His* burning, insatiable desire. He must hurry quickly, quickly out of this tunnel where that agonizing vibration could shake him to the heart. But agony or no, he would not give up now. Not with consummation so close in his embrace.

Blinding rainbows of pain shot out around him, through him, like widening circles of fire. There was noise, concussion. Unbearable weakness for a moment loosened every synapse in his being.

Through dark veils Alan saw the tunnel sloping down toward that corona of brilliance. Sir Colin, dark against it, leaned peering forward, gun poised, face contorted painfully with strain and terror. For one instant their eyes met. For one instant Alan was himself. He heard the echoes of the gunfire go rolling along the corridor, heard a faraway, musical tinkling and knew it for the destruction of Carcasilla. With a sudden, intolerable vividness he remembered Evaya, and he knew that he had lost.

They dare! They dare to threaten me, of the mighty race of— The name had no meaning even in Alan's altered mind. He had not known until that unspeakable name sounded there that the Alien had taken possession again. But it didn't matter now. He had lost, and he knew it, and the luxury, the bliss of surrender, was creeping warmly along his limbs. Not to fight any longer. Give up the hopeless struggle and let this strange beauty go flooding throughout his brain. This exquisite joy was too great for any human creature to sustain. This passion of hunger must be sated. A thousand years of hunger to be fed in one monstrous draught.

Time stood still, paused, and poised for that draught.

And then—thunder again, and the rainbows of colored agony went raying out around him, colors never seen on earth, spreading circles of pain that loosened the brain in his skull. The veils of darkness withdrew again as the Alien shuddered and retreated. Alan was aware very dimly that the golden tunnel lay before him.

But he did not see it. He hung submissive in the Alien's grasp. He knew that Sir Colin was staring up the slope at him, gun lifted, eyes seeking his eyes. He knew when the look of shaken horror dawned upon the old man's face—not horror at defeat, but a deeper revulsion at what Sir Colin saw. . . .

He did not care. He no longer had any capacity to care for anything. He waited for the Alien's return.

And then something stirred far back in his mind, in that corner of the brain which had been the last awareness to go, and now was the first to return.

"Kill it. Kill it. Kill it." Mike Smith was saying, over, and over, in his unmistakable voice.

Alan knew that he was mad. It didn't matter. He did not heed the voices even when Flande's familiar, weary tones spoke above Mike's monotonous chant.

"Yes, you must kill it," said Flande, calmly and sounded far away, though he spoke in the center of Alan's brain. "You must kill it, or I shall never know peace from this savage that is crying for revenge."

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A VAGUE point of curiosity quivered in Alan's relaxed mind. He knew they were dead. He had watched them die, long ago and far away.

"What does it matter?" he asked them voicelessly. "Who cares now?"

"I care!" Mike Smith's cry shook the silence.

And Flande said, "For myself, I would not care. I would not lift a finger to help if it meant the lives of all mankind. It does mean that. But I have passed too far beyond to care. If it were not for this —this *thing* bound up with me, because we were transmuted together, I would never speak again. But in this one question he is stronger than I."

"How?" Alan asked incuriously. It didn't matter. He waited only for the Alien to return.

"He was transmuted with one strong desire in his mind," Flande said wearily. "So strong it supersedes all else. The Light-Wearer must die or he will never be still and I shall never know the peace I need. I can crush him out like a candleflame, swallow him up in my own glory, once his desire is sated. But until then—"

Darkness and silence closed down about Alan in one monstrous swoop, a silently roaring vortex of hunger. Anger shook in the depths of it, and scorn. For a moment it stilled the voices in his brain. But then, far back, a point of light began to struggle through the darkness. A sun-circle of light ringed by a corona, and against its burning heart, a double shadow flickering.

Flande said, "Fight it now. Fight it, do you hear! I will help you because I must."

Below his words and running through them Mike's voice cried without inflection, "Kill it. Kill it. Kill it, Drake. Kill it." On and on.

Slowly, reluctantly, Alan felt strength flow back into his stilled mind. He did not want it. He fought against its coming. But Flande was inexorable. And Flande had a power drawn from some inexhaustible source. He was neither man or god now. He flamed in Alan's mind—a stellar nova, a newborn sun. Alan felt strength pouring irresistibly through his brain. He felt closed doors fly open before that shining flood.

Gunfire thundered all around him, its echoes rolling and redoubling until the world shook with sound. But this time it was not pain. The Alien no longer dwelt in the heart and center of his being. When it withdrew now, shaken and shuddering with the concussion, he blinked unseeing eyes that did not care what they looked upon. But the eyes and the brain behind them were his own again.

This time he was outside the Alien; he would be a stubborn, motionless core about which that vortex would beat in vain when it returned. He knew that passionlessly, not caring.

And the Alien knew it, too. It came back with a suddenness like a tornado's swoop, howling soundlessly with its rage and its ravenous starvation. It was not beaten yet. It fought a double foe, but it had weapons still to fight with . . . weapons tempered for this new, shining enemy filling his victim with its strength.

Alan felt the universe whirl around him. The tunnel was no longer here. The world fell away beneath him. Vertigo more terrible than earthbound man has ever known shook him sickeningly as the ground beneath his feet failed him, and the swimming, impersonal depths of interstellar space spun past his watching eyes, streaked with whirling stars.

Flande shrank a little from the sight. A little. Not enough to matter. Flande had powers to tap now that made earth unnecessary. The Alien raved again with his iron-cold anger, and the deeps of space fell away.

Now they were spinning through the cities of flame, where monstrous citadels floated upon lakes like fire. Beings like the Alien went flashing through their streets, being unrobed in the light that had veiled them from human gaze.

Alan could not see them. By a strong exertion of his will he *would* not see them. But Flande saw and flinched. Flande still hung on. And the fight went raging on with Alan its voiceless center, the vessel for Flande's dogged strength.

Gunfire again. The Alien gathered itself, shivering, and withdrew. Alan was blind to the tunnel now. He could see nothing but that great corona of light with Flande's image blazoned black upon its surface.

When the Alien came spinning and roaring back, Alan sensed somewhere within its vortex the violence of dawning despair. A subtle weakening of its purpose. But a determination, too, as it dredged up the last terrible power from the bottomless hunger of its being. And the battle took up once more around him.

He did not see the sights that Flande must look upon as the Alien dragged them both reeling through the corridors of its memory. They were sights perceptible

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only to senses no human owns. That alone saved Alan. If he had seen what Flande saw. . . . But he hung motionless in the heart of the vortex, waiting. Waiting through another burst of gunfire that shook the Alien to its depths.

When it collapsed, the collapse came suddenly. Alan was shocked out of his inertia by the indescribable feeling of surrender in the great tornado that still enveloped him. That terrible, inhuman cyclone had drained itself dry at last. It was running. It was beaten.

SO THE first of its great race to land upon earth, and the last of that race to live upon earth, knew that it had come to its defeat, its glorious, star-born destiny unfulfilled. And a terrible sorrow shook through the blindness that gripped Alan. He shared the inhuman grieving of this last of the mighty race whose name mankind would never know—a race with power too vast for man to conceive, with beauty too blinding for man to look upon, with evil grace that struck terror to man's very soul whenever he was obliged to confront it.

In its dying, it fled flashing and shinning under-earth, back to the citadel its great kinsmen had reared upon this alien planet. Alan saw it go. He saw the citadel lifting mighty symmetries against the alien moon, doorless, enigmatic, drinking in the pale light of earth.

The citadel had no entrance. But the Alien entered it, and briefly—for the flash of a remembrance—Alan entered, too.

Long ago he had wondered what great halls and mighty, vaulted corridors lay within. He knew now. It had no halls. It had no rooms. The citadel was a solid mass from wall to wall as far as human senses could perceive.

But the Alien went flashing through it along a prescribed course it knew well. Past the memorials of its nameless race that had come and ruled and died. Perhaps past the sepulchres of those who had come after it to earth, and died before its waking. In that one bright journey—in sorrow and loneliness and defeat—it reviewed the history that mankind will never know, and bade good-by to the glories of its mighty kinsmen and its mighty race.

And there in the heart of the citadel which no man will ever enter, the Alien in its own strange way ceased. . . .

"Wake up, laddie!" the burred voice urged. Familiar, from ages ago.

Alan opened his eyes. Glowing walls about him, fiery sun blazing before his face. But there was no shadow upon its surface now. His thoughts paused there, searching back for Flande.

Flande was gone. He had dreamed everything, his shaken mind told him. He must have dreamed it. He looked up to the familiar, ruddy face of the old Scotsman for assurance.

Sir Colin smiled. "We've won, laddie," he said in a thickened voice. "We've done it, somehow! Though for a moment, I thought— Well, no matter now. I saw it go. Och—" His voice softened. "I saw the miracle of *it* going. But I couldna tell you how."

A thin, musical crashing behind him made Alan look over his shoulder. What he saw framed in the tunnel mouth astonished him more than anything that had gone before. Yet it was a simple thing, something he had seen already. It was Flande's tower.

The structure was falling. In the little time while it toppled, then, all this had happened.

He watched it tilt over and down, majestically bowing out above the city. Very slowly it broke in the center and collapsed

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with a ringing series of crashes as its fragments struck Carcasilla's shining floor very far beneath. Bit by bit the spiral step fell after it.

The noise of its fall went echoing through the city, the vibrations making the delicate suburbs tremble. Here and there, far and near, soaring avenues trembled too much and broke with a singing, vibrant chord like music, and came tinkling and showering down to rouse more echoes, and bring more buildings to lovely, musical ruin.

For the first time since its conception, sound had entered Carcasilla, and sound spelled Carcasilla's doom. Allan stood listening to the delicate, ringing chords of the collapsing buildings. He was thinking of Evaya. He knew that he had won now, and that somewhere along the Way of the Gods, perhaps coming nearer and nearer with every passing moment, the real Evaya would be moving. Evaya with life glowing again like a lighted lamp behind her features as exquisite as carved ivory. Her hair lifting and floating upon the darkened air.

Evaya, coming back to ruined Carcasilla.

Yes, he had won. And he had lost. Mankind was reprieved now. The Source of the fountain that made Carcasilla immortal would go out to Venus in the waiting ship, and Sir Colin would go with it! Sir Colin, and Karen, and the Terasi. There would be a green world again, fragrant and sweet, shining with dew and rain.

But he would never see it. He would wait here for Evaya, who could not go. He would wait with her, here in shattered Carcasilla, while immortality ran low in the dying fountain and darkness closed in forever upon Earth.

* * *

Sir Colin nibbled thoughtfully at his fantastically featured pen. Then he dipped the quill into ink crushed from berries that never sprang from the sod of earth, and wrote on.

"—so we left them there," he wrote. "And because the journey was so long, and I growing old, I misdoubt I shall ever know their fate. But I know Alan Drake, and I know what happened to him. At least, in part I know—in his long fight with the Alien that lasted only while I fired five shots as fast as I could pull the trigger. He told me what he could of it. He told me about Flande, opening bright doors in his brain to the light of that burning sun.

"Such a light made Flande a demigod. Alan Drake had none so much of it, but a little taste he had. And I believe that taste was enough. I believe, as sure as there was a Scotland, that mankind still lives upon Old Earth.

"If any man could keep it alive, the man is Alan Drake. I make this record for the new generation of Terasi to remember, and for their children and grandchildren.

"Some day, somehow, I swear to you—your cousins from Old Earth will make their voices heard on Venus. And they will speak the name of Drake.

"The thing we left for them should be a legend by the time your generation reads this record. You will have heard of the shining room we took our Power-Source from, and how the stones glowed on after it was gone. It had poured out energy so long into those walls that energy still lived in them, and I think must live on—long enough.

"Long enough to power the machines they'll need—those fragile-seeming Carcasillians who were built on a tougher framework than anyone knew unless—as Alan knew—one had occasion to find out! He would never have spoken to me of the steely, resilient strength of Evaya's body when he held her in his arms, had he not known how important that knowledge would be to the future of mankind on Old Earth.

"So we know the Carcasillians were strong. And we know they had a limited source of power to set their machines going in the caverns the Terasi left behind. And we know, too, something we were too blind to think of at the time. There is one power-source upon Old Earth still living and strong in her extreme age. The great tides that thunder around the planet, following the moon, carving a mighty gorge in the earth as they race on. If the Carcasillians with their machines and their resilient strength can harness that tide—who knows, Old Earth may yet shine green again in the heavens!

"It is my belief they can. It is my belief that Alan Drake, with his knowledge and his power bequeathed by Flande, can save his beloved and the people of his beloved, and the world on which he chose to stay, because his beloved had to remain there.

"The fountain of immortality died, and Carcasillians live on. I shall believe it until I die myself. And, one day, I believe, all Venus will hear the great story which I can only guess at now. The story I shall never know."

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(Continued from page 10)

ONE OF CUMMINGS' BEST

"The Man Who Mastered Time" is one of the best Cummings stories I've ever read. Finlay's illustrations for it were also very fine. Incidentally, how about a Finlay cover? Lawrence is all right, and so is Saunders, but neither of them can match Finlay.

Leydenfrost, as usual, handled the cave man pic nicely. However, the story, "That Receding Brow" was boring. After "Ogden's Strange Story", I suppose all cave men themes will appear weak by comparison for a while.

I'm glad to see another s-f novel slated for next time. And I hope you don't wait too long before drawing on *Astonishing* and the old *Super Science*. Some great material is lying in those two magazines, fairly begging to be tapped.

How about installing a regular Swap-Column in addition to "What Do You Think"? Swap-talk can become pretty dull for non-swappers like myself.

MORTON D. PALEY

1455 Townsend Ave.,
New York 52, N. Y.

FOR BRITISH SUBSCRIBERS

After reading my first *Fantastic Novels* mag. I feel I must write and tell you how much I enjoyed it.

Yours is one of the first American mags I have seen in England since before the war, but they are beginning to creep slowly back now.

Where my next issue of F.N. is going to come from, I don't know; we don't get regular supplies as yet; maybe you can help me out on that score—I hope so.

After only reading one novel I can't offer much comment as yet but if all your stories are up to the "Minos of Sardanes" standard then the only comments you get from me will be good ones.

I should be pleased to hear from any of your readers—maybe one of them could help me out with some back numbers; I should be only too willing to do anything in exchange.

That's all for now, but I hope to hear from you in the near future.

F. LYLES.

2 Church St.,
St. Columb Minor,
Newquay,
Cornwall,
England.

Editor's note: We are informed that British subscribers can arrange at their local banks to fill out forms which will permit them to subscribe to any American magazine, and that the exchange rate can be computed thereon by the bank.

ABOUT HERBERT BEST YARN

The current novel was surprising and I was deeply interested in the style of writing manifested by Ray Cummings. It seems that he created a masterpiece second only to "The 25th Hour," by Herbert Best.

It has been established that Merritt is the lord of fantasy. The only story I read of his that was worth the effort was "The Metal Monster." This was exciting. "The Face In The Abyss" mostly nonsense. "Creep, Shadow!" was worth its weight in gold.

Nicely written stories, but I have read better by other authors. Much better.

An example is "The Purple Cloud" in F.F.M. M. P. Shiel's classic was unbeatable for characterizing.

This is probably the main reason why "The 25th Hour" tops my list.

JAMES W. AYERS.

609 First St.,
Attalla, Alabama

WANTS MORE H. G. WELLS

I finally decided to break a long silence and tell the world (as limited to Ye Dear Readers) just how much I enjoy reading the two best fantasy magazines published, F.N. and F.F.M. I read, off and on, eleven Fantasy and S-F mags, and I am of the firm opinion that in both illustrations and story material, your two fine magazines are at the very top of the collection.

The above comments might be taken, by one who doesn't read F.N. and F.F.M., to be merely a build-up for what I am now going to put down. . . .

I have for sale, some 30 assorted fantasy mags, all in fair to fine condition. These are mostly 1949 issues with a very few '48 issues in the lot. They range from *Astoundings* to *Weird Tales*. A really fine group is four *Astoundings*, October '48 through Jan. '49, containing A. E. Van Vogt's "The Players of A." These are in fine shape and have their edges and backs bound with scotch tape to prevent tearing—the covers, that is.

They're for sale for what they cost me, and those lacking covers, 10 cents less.

By way of ending this, how about printing some of H. G. Wells' rarer short stories? He's the old master yet, to me.

ROBERT FULTZ.

Rt. #1, Box 334,
Tamms, Illinois.

Editor's Note: See the August F.F.M., coming up, for "The Time Machine" by H. G. Wells.

MAX BRAND ENTHUSIAST

Anything that may have been said in rebuttal anent your having used "The Man Who Mastered Time," by Ray Cummings, in F.N. is all taken back after having viewed the unparalleled illustrations which Finlay contributed for the March issue. The only thing that broke the harmony was the Leydenfrost heading for "That Receding Brow," by Max Brand.

Kindly restore Paul back to his former helm of artistry, along with Finlay, of course, and the inimitable Lawrence, whose talents have been wasted on subject matter not suitable for his creative talents.

My feelings regarding the lead novel are unchangeable, but I was more than delighted with the reprinting of Max Brand's novelette. This is undoubtedly one of the rare issues of either

(Continued on page 121)

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"My ancestors were river gods and sacred cats."

DEATH'S

"LET ME SEE," said Talcott, "you have everything, have you?" He stepped to the laden pony and ran his hands over the multitude of things strapped to his sides. "You have your spade, your bar, your tackle. Better take another water-bottle; you never can tell about water by what the natives say, and you want enough to bring you back as well as take you out there. You have forage for this beast. And one, two, three tins of food for yourself. And picket rope. It is a bit unpleasant to be out in the desert and have your horses run away."

He stepped back a pace, looked the equipment over with a keen professional glance, nodded his satisfaction, and then turned to the young man who stood at his side.

"Now stand up here and let me inspect you. Tumble your things out here on this box and let me make sure that you have everything here that you ought to have."

Williamson smiled and took from his many pockets his watch, his compass, his medical kit, his map. Talcott looked at them keenly, nodded, and the younger man put them all back.

"And now let's look at your horse. Lift up, here!" He went around the four feet of the horse, inspecting each hoof carefully, peered at his eyes and into his mouth.

"Everything all right. You must forgive me if I seem to be a bit of an old maid about these things, but you remember that it was for want of a nail that the battle was lost."

"That's all right, sir," said the younger man; "just what I want."

"Now for the final instructions," said Talcott; "it ought to be just about eight miles out to this oasis that the natives told us about. You may find something there,

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SECRET

By J. L. Schoolcraft

and you may not. Sketch anything that interests you, and remember that it is always betted to err on the side of fullness than the other way. If there is anything there to be brought back which you cannot bring yourself, heliograph me, and I will come. There is a lot of interesting stuff in Samarkund, but I think that it is all here in the city. There would be no sense in putting anything away off there in the desert."

Williamson mounted and Talcott took his hand in his own strong grasp.

"You have my leave to depart," he said, smiling.

As the other dug his heels into the sides of his mount, he called out, "Williamson! Perhaps you had better take this. There is only one chance in a thousand that you will have any use for it, but scientists should be prepared for just that thousandth chance."

What could possibly happen if they should disobey an ancient edict made under the stars of Egypt twenty-seven centuries ago? Carelessly, they asked each other over the dead loveliness that no man was to have seen . . . and set forth homeward, toward the answer written in those same baneful stars. . . .

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He came alongside the other and pressed an automatic pistol into his hand.

"Here is ammunition."

"Nothing out there but a scorpion and a wild date or two," laughed the younger man, "but I suppose I had best take it."

With that he slapped the pony across the flank and started up what had once been the main thoroughfare of the ancient city of Samarkund. Now there was nothing to mark it but a pair of jagged stone stumps of what had been the posts to the gate. They were twice as thick as a man's body, and near one lay a capital of red stone, richly and curiously carved with the palm leaves as motif. Away on either side of the street stretched jagged lines of wall that had been uncovered. About them lay all the equipment of the expedition—shovels, small for the puny laborers that they had, and a narrow track with a car running out to a sand dump.

Williamson passed this and circled the laborers' camp. Tiny fires glowed like cigarette-butts in the dusk; goat-bells tinkled suddenly and were still. He turned his back to the camp and struck off through the desert.

The light in the heavens died with startling quickness, and stars, still strange to his northern eyes, burned in the velvet arc above him. Ahead of him rolled a ghostly procession of small hills. This was the desert of Panarshot—"The road to hell."

"And well named, too," said Williamson to himself. Like most men who are much alone, he had the habit of thinking aloud. "Sand and sand, and the only harvest those red knobs of rock!"

For two hours he rode, halting at half-hour intervals to breathe his horse. About the feet of the little beast the sand sucked in a silken whisper. It was hard going.

At the sixth halt a moon the color of ripe grain pushed up over the horizon with theatrical quickness. The whole country was bathed in a mellow, strong light, so clear that each wave in the sand threw a shadow black as ink. Where the moon struck, the sand glistened, making a path of light for all the world like that which it was casting somewhere else on a smooth water.

"Like a summer sea," said Williamson, "like a frozen summer sea."

He stood for a moment, lost in the vast beauty of the scene, then mounted, and struck off to the south. Soon he saw a delicate black filigree of palm trees—three of them—sprung from one base and drooping apart with languid grace.

"That must be Anarshan," he said.

The filigree slid slowly across the great, bright circle. When it had been quite gone for a half-hour, his horse raised his head, whinnied, and struck into a shuffling trot which carried him shortly to the edge of the oasis.

It was hardly more than twenty feet across. A carpet of coarse grass which gave up a pungent smell when crushed under the pony's hoofs spread about a spring that gushed up at the foot of the three palms. The water flowed, flaked with great patches of liquid silver where the moon struck it, then seeped off into the sand.

Williamson dismounted, eased the girths of the saddle, washed out the pony's mouth, and allowed him a few gulps of water.

From somewhere out on the desert came a queer, quavering cry. It began as a low wail and sharpened to a high scream of seeming anguish. The pony threw up his head and stood with nervously pointing ears.

"Steady!" said his master, and slipped back into the shadow of the trees, and threw a clip of cartridges into his pistol. He looked in the direction from which the pony was snuffing wind. He saw nothing but a rolling flat of country, silver with black patches where the red rock broke through the sand.

The pony was stock-still, trembling slightly.

For five minutes he stood tense, listening. Then his mount dropped his head to his forage and went on munching contentedly.

"Probably a jackal," said Williamson.

"Odd, though. Never heard one that sounded at all like that. Somewhere between animal and human. But the pony seems contented."

Still watchful, he opened a food tin and supped on army biscuit, chocolate, and raisins, washing them down with water from the spring. When he was finished, and had completed unsaddling his horse, the moon had ridden half across the heavens. He pressed the spring of his repeater, and the strokes beat upon the air like tiny silver hammers—three for the quarters, twelve for the hour.

"Quarter to one," he said. "Must be at work at four. Remember to whinny, Bucephalus, if anything comes around."

He leaned against a tree-trunk, started to light a cigarette, then thought of the strange cry, did not, put his automatic close at hand, and fell asleep.

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WHEN he awoke, the world was white with dawn. He stretched, walked up and down to get the stiffness out of his back and legs, washed, and started on a tour of inspection.

"Jove!" he exclaimed, as he rounded the tree-trunks. "Here is something!"

He was standing in front of a low, oblong structure about as long as a tall man, and a yard and a half wide. It was almost covered with sand; the door, however, was clear of it. From ground to roof he estimated it as being about five feet, although the sand made it impossible to know exactly.

Excitement leaped up in his eyes, and he started for the spade which stuck up out of his pile of equipment. But he checked himself and laughed.

"Food first!" he said. "Anyone would think that this was the first time you ever had seen an ancient tomb. It is almost the first."

He boiled some chocolate over a spirit lamp, made some soup from the concentrated powder he carried with him, breakfasted, fed the horse, and turned to examine his find.

As he looked, admiration grew. It was a beautiful piece of workmanship, built of the red porous rock in which the country abounded. He knew how difficult it was to work the soft material, but here the slabs had been so carefully made that in no joint could be thrust a leaf of the thinnest paper. The dryness of the country had prevented erosion; the joints stood out in thin, straight lines. For this reason and because there was no decoration, he could not even estimate the age of the structure.

There was a door, a single slab, with a crack running from top to bottom. To push it in might crush some relic of priceless value. A plan of campaign opened out in his mind; he would enlarge that crevice, draw out each half of the door. He took hammer and chisel from his equipment and set to work.

At noon he threw them aside impatiently. The heat was insufferable; to go on might mean that he would never return to camp. He sat down in the shade of the palms, made a sketch of the tomb as it stood, and waited for the sun to pass the meridian.

The sun was low in the west when he cut through for the first time. He paused long enough to eat, and feed his horse. The stars came out with the suddenness of city lights, and he was at it again. The rock lay about him in broad flakes.

At last the crack down the middle was broadened to a gap three inches in breadth. He inserted his iron bar, pried gently, and one side of the broken door fell outward. Using his bar as a lever, he worked it outward, and propped it against the side of the tomb. The other slab followed, and the broad doorway yawned blackly before him. A breath of hot air came out of it laden with an odor of spicy sweetness.

Williamson flashed his torchlight into the darkness. The light came back to him from a dozen colors of great richness.

Exultant, he put his head and shoulders inside the door, but withdrew quickly. It was stifling; the rock held the heat of a day, and the odor, while indescribably sweet, was almost overpowering.

Patiently he sat, fanning with his helmet in an endeavor to get new air into the black, tunnel-like structure before him. The sky yellowed; it was almost time for the moon to be up.

The odor that flowed out, heavily sweet, seemed to be compounded of that given off by some fragrant wood, a strong cinnamon-like smell and delicate lilylike scent. After he had fanned a quarter of an hour, he put his head within the doorway again. The air was comparatively fresh. He wriggled his body in and flashed his torch about him.

As the circle of brilliant white light struck the walls, an exclamation of joy escaped him.

The whole interior was a mass of brilliant decoration. The soft stone had been polished with the greatest care; even so, it did not take on the mirrorlike finish that a harder stone would have; instead, the decoration lay on a background of satiny red.

"It's Egyptian!" he exclaimed as the patch of light struck upon a frieze of alternate lotus and Anubis figures. This frieze ran about the four sides, close under the roof. The roof itself was a maze of running arabesques filled with gold. The pattern was repeated in the floor without the filling of gold. The walls were paneled broadly, and within each panel were stripes of raw red and blue.

At his side he felt the smooth roundness of a mummy case. He threw his light on it.

Outside, on the still air came the queer, blood-curdling cry. His heart caught. As best he could in his cramped position, he whirled about. His horse was whickering and plunging. One of the slabs which had made half of the door slid slowly from its

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position and fell across the opening. He jerked in his feet and saved them by the fraction of an inch. He fired once through the open door.

The acrid smell of powder curled about him. Outside was the sand glistening in the serene light of the moon. His horse's hoofs clattered against the stone as he raced up and down at the end of his tether.

For five minutes he lay, scarcely breathing. Then he put his helmet on his foot and protruded it through the opening. It remained, black against the light outside, undisturbed. There was still room for his body in the door; he squirmed out as best he could and sprang to his feet, clutching the comforting butt of his automatic.

The desert slept, mile upon mile, gentle wave after gentle wave of impassive, dreaming sand. The shadows of the palms fell inky black and deadly still. The spring whispered and snickered at his feet.

"Where is it, old fellow," he said to the horse, which stood snuffing and trembling, "and what is it?"

His mount turned his head this way and that, rolled his eyes, then dropped his head to his forage again.

"It may be that I did not prop up that slab squarely enough," he said slowly, "and it may be that I did. At any rate, I stay outside tonight."

Weary from his labor of the day before, he slept through until long after dawn. When he awoke he circled the camp, but there were no prints either in the sand or on the rock. But the desert sand is almost a living thing, endowed with a motion of its own; even if the wind did not blow, he knew that it moved and covered things with what seemed to be of its own will.

As soon as the sun was up he mounted a little hillock and began flashing a message to Talcott. For a quarter of an hour his call shot across the desert. Then an answering flash of light winked out, and he signaled:

"Come at once. Bring a draft animal."

"Am starting at once," came the answer.

With that he turned to breakfast, feeding his horse and making his little camp clean for the keen eyes of his chief.

Then he stood looking at his find.

"Too bad we have not a tractor," he said regretfully; "the whole thing ought to be in the British Museum."

His resolution to stay outside until someone was there to watch weakened under the spell of the fascinating mystery before him. He entered the tomb, this time to look at the mummy case.

THE floor was a solid slab, and, part of it, two trestles rose to the height of about six inches. They supported a case of what had been yellow wood, superbly lacquered. But age had turned the bright yellow to a golden brown. It was a short case, almost that of a child. He thought that it must be that of a child until he looked at the face of the occupant which was painted on the outside.

Instead of the conventionalized face common to most of the cases he had seen, this one was done with consummate art. It was a portrait—the portrait of a girl just coming to womanhood. The eyes were opened, deep with mystery. The lips were full and still bright in color. Eyebrows, small and fine, and the hair, almost concealing the low, broad forehead, were inky black. The smooth roundness of the case told him, too, that this was all that was left of some girl grown into womanhood with the sudden bloom of the tropics.

The rest of the cover held only conventionalized patterns; yet he found, there, the wavy line which stands for the Nile and the dog-headed figure of Anubis.

The wood of the case had shrunk; a long crack showed where the cover had been joined, and the pegs could be seen like uncovered tendons. It was only necessary to grip with the fingers and pull strongly in order to lift the cover quite off. This Williamson did, revealing a figure, wrapped with the finest of cloth, which still retained the roundness of youth.

There were no jewels or gold. In one end of the case was a small porphyry case filled with some substances which still gave off a poignantly sweet, lilylike odor. The treasure lay in the profusion of decoration and in the infinite care with which it was executed.

In the foot of the case was a small bamboo box, sealed at either end with a tarlike substance. It was becoming unbearably warm in the tomb; he took the bamboo case out with him into the open, chipped off the ends, and drew out a tightly rolled manuscript made on papyrus of wafer thinness, still soft.

He laid it across his knees. The writing was Egyptian, the black and red still bright. Sitting in the shade of palms, he set to deciphering it.

This is the story of Nalinthia, daughter of Notki, priest of Anubis.

"All right, my dear," he said; "but how did you get up here?"

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I tell this my story in order that vengeance may be taken for me and in order that my body may be buried after the fashion of my kind, and not be burned as is the custom among these beasts living here.

For my body must be whole against the time when the spirit will come again. I shudder to think of my soul wandering through eternity looking for a body. And the flames curling about me!

Williamson laughed gently at this naïve touch. But his amusement deepened to intense interest as he read into the story. Abruptly the tone changed to that of passionate appeal.

Oh, my beloved one! Thou who wouldst have been my husband had I not been torn from thee by those I loathe to name. A child I was, for since my birth fourteen summers had flooded the Nile when I was taken by these who were guests in my father's house.

But for the memory of thee I had died long since. For I knew that some time thou wouldst find me and we could be happy again. But now my body has become a loathing to me, and even thy love, great as the Nile, could not accept me.

I have taken my life, which is against the express command of Anubis, but I have been told by a sign that for me it is fit. And I shall rest easy in the halls of the dead, knowing that for each of my wrongs thou wilt take a life. And some time when the rolling years have come to a new time we shall be together again, for I know that my soul will find these as long as I am I.

Read, then, the story of my wrongs.

For upward of an hour Williamson toiled with the hieroglyphics.

When he had finished he sat motionless for a long time. The sun was at its height; the desert was a mass of leaping, vaporous heat-waves through which the patches of rock nodded and leaped.

At last he rose to his feet.

"Poor little kid!" he murmured. "Poor little kid!"

He passed his hand over his brow, trying to dispel the sense of reality that the story inspired in him. It was a tale of cruelty and refined wickedness that made his clean Anglo-Saxon blood run cold.

He turned again to the manuscript. There was a sentence at the bottom which he had overlooked. There was the conventional figure of the story-teller—a man squatting before another. Then there was the sun and an arc indicating the passage of twenty-four hours. Then there was the figure of the boatman which stood for death.

"Whoever tells this story will die within twenty-four hours," he translated; *"it is not good that such things be in the minds of men. I have had a sign that this shall be so."*

"You may trust me," he said earnestly; "you may trust me! I hope that revenge was taken, and fully." He turned to the tomb. "So that was how this came to be built. Done by her sweetheart. A labor of love!"

It was with a feeling of reverence that he entered the structure again and set about sketching the decoration. As he worked away, this new contact with reality led him to say, "Of course I do not believe that the curse holds."

Nevertheless, when the distorted figures of Talcott's caravan hove in sight, he resolved for the time being to say nothing about his find. He slipped it into his sketching-case. The figures came sliding across the long slope, leaping to gigantic proportions one minute and dwindling to absurdity the next. The sun had declined, and the faint breeze was talking hoarsely in the palms, but heat-waves still bounded from the sand, and each nubbin of red rock was a center of fanning irradiation.

"What ho!" sang out Talcott as his figure drew down to normal. His browned, strong face was shiny with sweat. With him was Purdy, the engineer of the expedition, a short, blond man with a continual worried pucker between his eyes. His first words were:

"Well, let's get things started. Lord only knows what those natives are doing while we are gone."

"What did you find?" asked Talcott.

"A tomb done in pure Egyptian, a mummy, a sick jackal yowling, are all that I have to report."

"Anything in the mummy case?"

"No, sir."

Talcott wedged his broad shoulders into the opening, and the others could hear him muttering to himself, "Extraordinary! The whole thing ought to be in the British Museum! Beautiful work! Purest Egyptian. Cannot get it out with our present equipment. Marvelous perfume. Still sweet after twenty-five centuries. Lotus, I should say."

At last he backed out.

"It's a find, all right!" he said, wiping

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the sweat from his forehead. "There was nothing in the case to explain how this Egyptian work came into existence three hundred leagues from the Nile?"

"No, sir; nothing there but the body and the porphyry box."

"Well, it will give us all some beautiful chances for theory, and there is nothing that a scientist loves more than a hypothesis. We can sling the mummy and case on one of the camels. It is a shame that we have not the wheeled equipment to take the whole thing right with us. It is a remarkable find, all right. You deserve the credit. Young man," he said, looking down at his subordinate, while a kindly smile played around his earnest eyes, "it will make you famous, for the whole story of this part of the expedition will be done by you in a separate monograph."

Williamson laughed like a boy.

"Thank you, sir," he said. "This is certainly kind of you."

THE mummy case was brought out with infinite care, wrapped in many yards of burlap and dried moss, put in a box that Purdy knocked together out of some lumber which had ridden on the back of a camel, and the whole was hoisted to the back of the grunting beast.

By starlight they set out, and the palms faded behind them into the limitless darkness of the desert night. The sand flowed about the feet of the animals in a silken whisper; the natives chattered in high, feminine voices; the pony bridles clinked, and the camels grunted heavily.

The men pushed up over the hills; each wrinkle in the sand lay clear, silver and jet; back of them the palm fronds were touched into a fine tracery of the same colors.

Williamson turned in his saddle to say good-by to this place where so much had come to him. It was to make him, a comparatively young and unknown man, into one whose name would be heard with respect by the scientific world.

Was that a cry that he heard—a sound that began in the low register and climbed to a scream almost feminine in shrillness? It was ghostly thin. His horse pricked up its ears and turned its head, paused, blew through its nostrils, then put his head down and plodded on.

Williamson pushed ahead where the chunky figure of Talcott loomed up at the head of the procession.

"Did you hear that jackal, sir?"

"No," said the other; "riding close to these grunting beasts, one could not hear the trump of doom."

Back in the camp, Williamson turned to working up the report which would make his name famous in the world of Oriental science. An Egyptian tomb found in the desert of Puntarshot, a thousand miles from the Nile, had just the touch of the unusual necessary to stimulate interest in his work. He knew how the strangeness of such a thing would tantalize the curiosity of his colleagues.

What to do with the story of the girl, he did not know. He had fibbed instinctively to Talcott. The story had touched him deeply, and at the time when Talcott had put his question he was still under the spell of it. He had the same hesitation at repeating the story as he would have had about retelling a bit of gossip about some of his own women friends in England.

But how to make the report complete without telling the story he did not know. He was certain that sooner or later, unless he did tell the thing, some one of his colleagues would hint that young explorer's imagination had run away with him, and that this Egyptian tomb was not all that was claimed for it.

As he went deeper and deeper into the work and saw what a treasure he had come across, the feeling of reluctance faded, and the passion of the scientist to tell the truth grew.

At length he decided to put the matter up to Talcott, a man of great experience, whose high scientific ideals were tempered by a kindly spirit.

He found Talcott sitting in front of his tent on a camp-stool that bent perilously under his weight. Before him, he had some fragments of pottery which had been unearthed that day. He was inspecting them by the light of an acetylene lamp at his side.

"Nothing new," he said, in response to the greeting of his subaltern. Nevertheless, he wrapped them carefully, marked them, and put them away in his tent.

"Sit down, my boy," he said. "You will find a box in the tent."

When Williamson was seated and drawing on his pipe, Talcott said, "How is the report coming? Have you any theory as to how this tomb came to be here, so far from home?"

"No, sir," said Williamson quietly. "I know."

"Indeed! How?"

"I found a manuscript in the mummy case, which I told no one about. I am not

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sure I ought to tell any one about it now. It is partly a matter of sentiment and partly a matter of honor."

For a moment the older man pulled away at his pipe.

"I do not see why I should not leave it to you," he said, with kindly seriousness. "Of course we have a duty to the men who sent us out here and another duty to the truth. As a matter of fact, that is the only allegiance that men of our sort have—an allegiance to the truth."

"Quite right, sir. But suppose this is of no value to science?"

Talcott sat upright in his chair.

"Anything that is true is of value," he said earnestly; "anything that is true! We may not see the bearing of it at once; some day some one may come along and build on the humble foundations we have laid. I knew a man at Oxford who spent his time counting the words in the world's great books. He numbered them in the Bible, the Koran, Shakespeare, Cervantes, and so on. We used to laugh at him; but one day he went into a court, testified in a lawsuit between printer and editor, and saved a grave injustice. You have heard of Burnside, who spent most of his life in Australia classifying the insects there. He died, but in the next generation some one built on his work and saved the commonwealth millions of dollars by using Burnside's notes in his work of exterminating insect pests.

"The chain may not be clear to you in this case, but remember that we live in a present which has its roots in the past. The slightest knowledge we have of that past may mean a great deal to us in the present.

"It is the great glory of science that it has but one allegiance—the truth!"

"I forgot to say, sir, that there is a threat at the end of the manuscript, which says that any one who tells this story will die within twenty-four hours. Of course, I have no fear of this threat. A fifteen-year-old girl, dying twenty-five centuries ago, more or less, could have no effect on men today."

"Undoubtedly not," said his chief.

"Sir, I will put it to you. The manuscript in the mummy case told the story of a girl, written by herself, who was abducted and subjected to such torture, mental and physical, as I had not dreamed possible. She told the story in order that her sweetheart might avenge her, and I hope to God that he did! At the end she says that it is not good that such things be in the minds of men, and adds the threat which I have spoken of—that any one who tells the story will be dead within twenty-four hours. You know that I am not afraid, but I felt, somehow or other, that the girl was putting me on my honor."

"M-m," said the chief. "In love with a mummy?"

"Not at all."

FOR a long time Talcott was silent.

"I see no reason why I should not leave it to you," he said finally. "I put this thing into your hands. I see your point, and it does you credit to feel as you do.

"Of course there is nothing to be afraid of. We are Europeans living in an age which worships test tubes, not Egyptians living in an age which worshipped cats."

"Very well, sir," said Williamson. "I shall tell you the whole thing, and you can give me some advice as to how best to present the story. It ought to be a sensation in the scientific world."

There was the rasp of hobnails on the ground, and Purdy drifted in out of the darkness.

The worried pucker was deeper.

"Sorry to bother you," he said, "but the beggars seem to be a bit restless tonight. Think there is anything wrong?"

Talcott bent his head and listened to the hum that came from the jumbled mass of shadows and tiny points of light that stood for the laborers' camp.

"Any liquor?"

"Not that I know of."

"Any speeches?"

"No."

Talcott listened for a moment more.

"Sounds normal," he said. "Look out for speeches and liquor. You do a great deal of unnecessary worrying, Purdy. Sit down. Williamson has something interesting to impart."

"This is the story of Nalinthia, daughter of Notki, priest of Anubis," began Williamson.

For fifteen minutes his voice sounded in the quiet night. Talcott's pipe went out. Purdy sat with his head bent, staring at the ground. The hum of busy life in the native camp softened as the brown men dropped off to sleep.

When the voice had ceased, they were all silent for a moment.

Then Purdy leaped to his feet.

"My God!" he cried. "Isn't there something that can be done to make up for that? What incredible beasts! I hope to God there is a future life, and I hope that

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the little girl's curse against them holds, and that somewhere those hyenas are stewing in boiling oil."

"You forget," said Talcott in his strong, even voice, "that if the curse against them holds good, so does the curse against the man who repeats the yarn. That man happens to be our young friend who is here."

"You're right!" said Purdy. "Good Lord! I would not tell that story for all the money in the world!"

"You are a rank sentimentalist!" said Talcott. "The girl has been at peace now for several thousands of years. So have those who are responsible for her death. We might hang them in effigy or send up prayers that their souls be tortured; I see no other way for us to do anything against them."

"But aren't you afraid?" said Purdy to Williamson.

"Of course he is not!" interposed the chief crisply. "Of course not! This is the twentieth century."

"Twentieth century or not," said Purdy in retort, "I have seen just enough to know that the Orient is closer to the twentieth century before Christ than it is the twentieth century after Christ.

"Eleven o'clock," said Talcott. "Time we all turned in."

The next day Williamson ran into a snag in making his report. There was one point in his sketch of the frieze of the tomb which was not quite clear. It had been dark in the place when he made his drawings, and he had put in but one section of the frieze, since all the sections were the same. But whether the dog-headed figure faced to the right or the left, he was not sure. The sketch seemed to show that it faced to the left, but this was in defiance of all Egyptian tradition. He must make sure. There was nothing for it but to make a trip to the tomb and settle the matter.

"I can go tonight," he calculated. "Make sure in about five minutes, and be back before noon tomorrow."

He went to where Purdy and Talcott were directing the excavation of a temple site.

"Can you spare me? I must go back to the tomb to make sure about a detail in the decoration."

"Certainly," said Talcott.

"Good Lord!" said Purdy, "if I were you I would put myself in a safety deposit vault until the twenty-four hours which you are given after telling that yarn have expired."

Rot!" said Williamson, and the chief joined him in his laugh at Purdy's fear.

Talcott gave him his customary inspection before he started. Williamson found that his watch had run down, set it to accord with the dial on Talcott's wrist, and started out for his journey to the oasis of Anarshan.

For one who professed such contempt for the threat of the dead princess, Talcott was rather attentive to the time of his subaltern's return. Noontime came and with it no Williamson.

"What time did he say he would be back?" asked Purdy.

"According to his estimate, he should be back now," replied the other, "but his work may have taken him more time than he thought."

They sat down to a lunch of tinned beef, army soup, jam, and tea.

"You know, chief," said Purday, "if I were you I would not have let that boy out of my sight for those twenty-four hours. I may be a fool."

"You are," was the prompt response. "The boy is much safer here than he would be in his own home in London. Safest place in the world. No trains to push you down, no buses to run over you, no disease germs."

"Yes," replied the engineer, "nothing here but a lot of grinning hyenas who would knife you for a copper cent. They have been milling around a bit tonight."

"Purdy, you are an efficient man all right, but you would be much more efficient if you did not worry so much."

Supper time came but Williamson did not. Talcott undressed and lay on his cot. It was only after he had lain there for a moment that he realized that mechanically he had put his revolver close to his side and that his hand was clutching the butt of it, and that he was gaining a great deal of subconscious comfort thereby.

He laughed shortly, put the pistol out of bed, and resolutely fell asleep.

HE WAS awakened by Purdy's scratching on his tent wall.

"Yes," he said, instantly awake and collected, "anything wrong?"

"Oh, nothing special," was the reply, "I just could not sleep and wondered if you had some bromide."

"Bromide nothing! What are you worrying about now?"

"Nothing. On my word, chief!"

"What time is it?" asked Talcott.

"One o'clock."

"He ought to be back," said Talcott.

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"I was thinking that, too," said the other.

"Let's see," said Talcott, "it is eight miles out there. He started at evening—at six. I remember that he set his watch. He would be there by ten at least, unless he lost his way and this is highly improbable. His sketching may have taken him five minutes and it may have taken him five hours. If it took him five minutes, he should have been back yesterday at noon; if it took him five hours, he should have been back last evening."

He stood with his head bent, calm, self-possessed, every faculty of a trained mind, a strong body, and a calm spirit bent on the problem before him. Purdy was comforted in the presence of the strength before him. He never ceased to wonder at his chief—a man who never made a joke, and yet who was never lacking in kindness and thoughtfulness, a man who was never so much himself as in the presence of a difficult problem.

"We will wait here one hour," said Talcott crisply. "If, at the end of that time, he has not come back, you go out with two of the best natives. I will stay here. I can handle anything that might arise here and can keep the work going."

Silently they walked to Purdy's tent, which stood on the edge of the native camp. They piled saddle, bridle, water bottles, forage in front of it and stood waiting. From somewhere out on the desert came a faint, rhythmic sound. It ceased. Talcott stood with his head bent, impassive, ears strained to this new note in the heavy silence.

Somewhere near them a native started to his feet and ran, his hands over his head, eyes closed, moaning in a dream. Talcott's heavy boot caught him in the shins, he tumbled and lay prone, silent.

The sounds came again.

"Thank God!"" said Purdy. "Here he comes!"

"Hush!" said Talcott.

The sound strengthened to a drumbeat of horse's hoofs.

"That horse is running with an empty saddle," said Talcott calmly. "No man would ride like that. Hear him stumble."

There was a slithering clatter on the rock and for a moment the beat of hoofs stopped, only to be taken up again with increased sound. About them, in the dark, shrill voices arose and they could see the dark glimmer of naked bodies as the sleepers sprang up in a wild scramble.

Williamson's horse careened through the camp, stirrups flying.

Talcott caught him by the rein and threw the whole weight of his body against the already exhausted beast. He came to a stop and stood with his head scarce six inches from the ground. The sand flew up in puffs to his labored breathing; he stood with his legs apart and his belly sucked up in an agony of exhaustion.

Talcott was at the saddle in an instant, throwing the white light of an electric torch over its surface. From that he went to the other equipment, examining it all with the greatest care and trying to apply logic to the evidence at hand.

"First, we must know whether or not the accident took place before he reached the tomb, or after," he said, more to himself than to Purdy, who was standing with the lines in his brow deepened to helplessness.

"The water bottles are full, but he might have filled them at the spring. We might tell by the taste of the water except that the canteen flavors everything. The forage is gone; therefore the probability is that he used it all up and was starting back. But this is weakened by the fact that the pony has been galloping and may have thrown it off. The same with his sketches. There are no marks on the saddle. Some of the food tins are gone, but they may also have been thrown. There are no marks on the saddle or on the pony's back.

"Purdy, take two of the best men from the camp and go out. Take your rifle. Scour the country on each side of the trail. You will find no prints in the sand worth anything because of its shifting. Watch for marks on the rock."

He led the staggering pony away and then put the expedition in motion.

During the day and the night in which Purdy was gone, Talcott had never been more exact or more exacting. The records for work done on those days surpassed any others. His finds were scrupulously labeled and filed away; any native loafing behind a foundation wall was sure to hear the deep voice booming at him.

In the early morning Purdy came riding in, white, the pucker between his eyes deeper than ever. Talcott met him, talked calmly in the presence of the natives and followed Purdy to his tent, helped him off with his boots, and mixed him a bromide.

"No signs at all," said Purdy helplessly. "Tomb sealed up as we left it. I opened it, but there was nothing there. There are no signs on the road. I sent men out on each side, but they found nothing."

Talcott nodded, and left his subordinate to sleep.

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For two days they worked with nothing to indicate that anything was wrong. They were hard put for records—Williamson had been the only man who could sketch—the heat had made photographic plates useless.

On the third day there was trouble in the native camp. When the dawn came, a half dozen of them did not arise, but lay snoring stertorously.

In some way native liquor had been smuggled into the camp—villainous stuff made of young palm shoots, crushed and fermented.

Another half dozen of the natives reeled under the lashes of the headmen. One of them, a short, undernourished thing, staggered past Talcott, stumbled and fell. From his breech clout rolled something that glistened in the new light, trundled over the sand in a long, eccentric curve, and came to rest at Talcott's feet.

It was Williamson's watch.

He stooped, picked it up.

"Bring that man to my tent," he said to the headman, "he needs punishment."

He turned to where Purdy was scolding helplessly, trying to get the gangs into some sort of organization. With a few words of brisk command, Talcott had them under control, fed, and at work.

FOR an hour he watched them. "Come to my tent soon. Make it casual," he said to Purdy.

In his tent he found the native lying doubled, the whites of his eyes showing through parted lids. The white man straightened him, gagged him with a tightly rolled bandage from his medicine kit, sprinkled water on his head, and put a bottle of aromatic spirits under his nose.

The man groaned, rolled his head from side to side, and opened his eyes.

Purdy strolled in, stopped still at the sight.

Talcott held up a warning hand.

"This rolled out of his breech clout just now," he said and held out the watch.

"Murder," gasped Purdy, "with robbery as motive!"

The blank, rolling eyes of the native looked about, with intelligence dawning in them, and after intelligence, fear.

"What do you know about this?" Talcott demanded.

The eyes closed, and the face took on the impassivity of a sphinx.

Talcott jerked the man to a sitting posture.

"Tell me!" he said in a low voice. "You are the man who has bad dreams. I saw you running in your sleep, pursued by a dream. Tell, or I swear that for the rest of your days you will be haunted by visions of drowned men and women who have died by violence."

The face remained impassive.

"I speak the truth," Talcott went on, "and I give you this for a sign."

He tore a piece of fine paper into a dozen pieces, rolled them into a ball, breathed upon it, unrolled them. The paper came out untorn.

The tobacco brown eyes of the native widened in terror at this. He drew himself to Talcott's feet, touched them twice with his forehead.

He looked up like a frightened spaniel and nodded his head.

"And remember that this is to be spoken of by no one. If you tell aught that has passed here, the curse will hold."

The native nodded again, and his inquisitor took the gag from his mouth.

"Where did you get this?"

He held up the watch.

"From the body of the sketching effendi."

"What does he say? What does he say?" asked Purdy, whose mastery of the native tongue had never been too complete.

"And where does the body lie?"

"Two leagues from this camp on the road to Anarshan."

"You killed the sketching effendi to get his watch and his money," said Talcott. "Tell me the truth or I swear that you will suffer so that each day of your life will be as a year."

The thin body twitched and trembled, and he broke into a flood of protest.

"No, effendi, I swear by the soul of my mother! The effendi's body lay by the side of the road. I did not tell master for fear he would stop the work and then we all should starve. I had of him his watch. Others had of him his pistol and other things. I swear by my hope of Nirvana that he was not struck by me or by any other man of this camp. We know not how he came to his death. His head was split so"—he drew his finger in a curved line from crown to brow—"and his face was not the face we knew."

"He lies!" said Purdy, who had gathered the drift of what was being said. "His body is not by the roadside. I looked, and two others marched on each side of the road to see. There is no body there."

"The engineer effendi says that you lie. He looked through his glass which sees all things, and no body lies by the road."

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"It did," said the native humbly. "We moved it—two others and myself, for the jackals were about and we feared that if it were found the work would cease and we should all starve. I will fetch the other things which we had of him."

"What beasts," groaned Purdy. "Typical native logic. As though we would not find him sooner or later."

"Go!" said Talcott to the native. "Bring the other things that were the sketching effendi's property. Speak no word of this!"

The native slid out of the tent, and Purdy wiped his brow.

"I did not know you were a juggler," he said to Talcott.

His chief made no answer, but stood with his brows knitted.

Within five minutes there was a scratching at the tent wall, and a brown arm laid Williamson's pistol, his belt, his pen, and his purse on the ground.

"Wait," said Talcott. "Be ready to go with us in a moment."

"My God! My God!" said Purdy. "What a fine lad he was!"

"Was!" said Talcott sharply. "Is! How do we know the beggar is not lying? You make me weary with your imaginings!"

As they swung into saddle, he said, "I beg your pardon for speaking bruskly. Of course you are right. There is not one chance in a thousand."

They found Williamson lying in a crevice about a hundred yards off the road. The head was crushed. In addition it was swollen almost beyond recognition. There were deep scratches in the flesh, perhaps made by being dragged over the rock by a maddened horse.

Purdy wept as they straightened the clean young body, and folded the hands across the breast. Talcott stood at the head and repeated as best he could the prayer of the English church for those fallen far from home.

"Dust to dust—ashes to ashes. Amen."

They filled in the grave with loose stones, marked it as best they could, noted its location carefully on a map, and turned toward camp.

TWO nights later, Purdy scratched at his chief's tent flap.

"Come in," said the latter in a low voice. "I was not sleeping, either."

"See here!" Purdy burst out. "This thing is getting on my nerves. What I want to know is: did the boy die within twenty-four hours after telling that damned story!"

"I do not know," said Talcott.

"Isn't there some way of finding out?" groaned Purdy. "I am not such an inhuman machine as you are. It's getting on my nerves!"

"I do not blame you," said his chief patiently; "it is a gruesome thing."

"If he died on the way out," said Purdy, "he died before those twenty-four hours were up. He was found about six miles out. It would take him about three hours to get there. He started at six, which means that he died at about nine. That is, if he were thrown on the way to Anarshan. And if he was thrown on the way out, that damned story did him in! If he was killed on the way back, it did not. The point is, when did it happen, when he was going out or coming back?"

"As far as I can see, it makes no difference," said Talcott calmly; "the boy is dead and that is the end of it."

But he added, a moment later, throwing up his head, "It does make a difference. I persuaded the boy to tell his story. It is a good thing to know. We are all working in the cause of science, and it is my duty as a scientist to know all that can be known!"

"Yes, but how?" said Purdy helplessly. "How?"

"I have his watch. The crystal is broken, the case is dented, and the hands are bent. But I have ascertained that the works are all right and that the man who found it did not know enough to wind it."

He brought out the watch and pressed the spring of the repeating mechanism. The strokes rang out on the still night—nine for the hour and no more.

"It stopped at nine o'clock," he said.

"Just as I said," exclaimed Purdy. "He was killed at nine o'clock; just as I said!"

"It may have been nine in the morning," replied his chief calmly. With his strong fingers which could be so gentle with some fragile treasure which he had unearthed, he bent the hands until one stood at nine and the other at twelve.

"I saw the boy wind this watch tightly at six just as he started. It is a Swiss movement and will run accurately just twenty-eight hours. At the end of that time it stops. This watch has run from six until nine. If it stopped at nine in the morning, it will run for twenty-eight less fifteen, making thirteen hours. If it stopped at nine o'clock in the evening it will run twenty-five hours. The only thing to do is to start the thing off and see if it goes beyond thirteen hours."

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He looked at the luminous dial strapped to his own wrist.

"It is now one o'clock. If this watch runs past two tomorrow, we shall know."

He shook the watch gently and held it to his ear to make sure that it was going.

"Go to bed, Purdy," he said. "I shall put it under my pilow to keep it safe."

"My God!" breathed Purdy. "I could no more sleep with that under my pillow than an insomniac with a trip hammer under his window."

The next morning Talcott called Purdy into conference.

"We have done as much as we can," he said, "with our present equipment. We had best lay our plans to leave within the week. Put up as many sand fences as you can. They will keep the stuff partly uncovered, and perhaps we shall all be back here in a year with a tractor or two. With Wiliamson gone there is not much we can do with the sketching. Fortunately the best things are light enough to be carried."

"I suppose that means the mummy."

"It certainly does!"

Talcott called in the three headmen from the village.

"Within seven days we go," he said.

All morning he worked, packing away the smaller articles in square, gray boxes, marked with the O.E.S. of the Oriental Exploration Society.

Purdy drifted in and stood like a restless schoolboy.

"Is it running?" he asked.

"What?" said Talcott. "Your tongue?"

"You know what I mean. The watch."

"Yes," was the reply, "and going strong."

As the morning wore on, Purdy grew more and more restless. A native dropped a shovel behind him; he jumped and swore. He ordered his lunch served in Talcott's tent. The watch lay on the top of a cracker box, its beating abnormally loud because of the sounding board beneath it.

"We have found some good things," rumbled the chief, "and established a new theory about trade routes. The Germans think that the main line of travel lay north of here, but the walls of the great caravansary which we have uncovered will prove that the route lay much farther south than any so far projected."

"Farther south than what?" asked Purdy vaguely.

"Purdy, you old woman! I suppose I shall have to sit here and watch you fidget until that timepiece stops at two o'clock."

In spite of his coolness, both real and assumed, Talcott grew a bit silent as his own watch drew toward two o'clock and the hands of the repeater moved toward ten. At five minutes before the hour the engineer arose and stood over the timepiece. The twisted hands moved with infinite slowness; but eventually the long hand stood at twelve and the short one at ten.

"Gosh!" breathed Purdy, "it's stopping, isn't it?"

His chief said nothing. The long hand moved to one minute past twelve, two minutes, three minutes. When it stood at five minutes past, Purdy said, "That settles it, doesn't it? It is still going."

"Wait," said Talcott. "Make sure."

Five minutes more they watched. The ticking still went on. Talcott took the watch and gently tested the spring. It was still taut.

"That settles it," he said. "The chances are ninety-nine out of a hundred that he died at nine in the evening on his way out. But see here, Purdy, you do not think for a moment that his telling the story had anything to do with it?"

"I do not know," said the engineer helplessly. "I suppose not. All the same I would not tell the yarn!"

At a quarter of two o'clock the next morning Talcott arose from his cot and stood over the watch.

At two it was clicking briskly; as the hands drew past ten the clicking halted; there were one or two spasmodic ticks and then silence.

IN THE early dawn of a week later, Talcott stood alone in what had been the main thoroughfare of the ancient city of Samarkund. About him lay the great, crude rectangles of what had been the market, a temple, a caravansary, a palace. They were partly concealed by sand fences, queer shutterlike structures that deflected the drifting sand.

And yet he knew that the desert would soon take to itself what he had forced her to yield up. The sand was a living, slow, malignant thing with consciousness. It would climb above the puny instruments set to keep it out; soon there would be no sign of Samarkund except perhaps the lonely capital lying on a ledge of rock.

Beyond him he saw the long line of black figures that made up his caravan, dwindling to nodding absurdity in the distance. A man does nothing for the last time without regret. Here he had put the whole strength of his nature for over a

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"I shudder to think of my soul wandering through eternity looking for a body."

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year. For the last time he walked about the ancient streets. He turned and looked out toward Anarshan. Beyond was the desert, impassive, dreaming in the white dawn.

"Good-by, my boy," he said. "Good-by!"

He turned to his pony and set one foot in the stirrup.

Was that a cry he heard out in the limitless void about him, a low wail climbing to a sharp scream—something between animal and human? It came a phantom voice—thin as the light which lay over everything.

For five minutes he stood, immobile, head bent.

Then he swung himself into his saddle and made off after his caravan. The sound had not been repeated.

Once on shipboard and bound for home the worried pucker smoothed itself out of Purdy's brow. He became, in the words of Mrs. Vandeventer, who occupied the one luxurious cabin aboard, the "life of the ship." He started a movement for a concert to be given in the saloon with himself as announcer of the program. It was he who organized the shuffleboard tournament. It was he who took the first cabin passengers to the steerage and lectured to them on the different races represented in the chattering mob of Orientals.

Most of all it was Purdy who sat by the hour in the smoking-room looking into the bottom of tall glasses which were apparently self-emptying.

He came to Talcott's cabin one day where the latter spent all of his time putting his notes in order.

"Chief," he said, slapping Talcott on the back, a familiarity he had never quite dared before, "I promised Mrs. Vandeventer that you would give a talk in the saloon to-night on some of your explorations in the Orient. Something informal and chatty, you know. Little anecdotes about the use of hairpins among the ancient Samarkundians or the habits of the wild gazelle fish. Anything! If you don't want to tell the truth, make up something, and if you do not want to make up something, give me the word and I will compose something for you." He giggled and hiccuped and stood swaying just a little more than the smooth motion of the ship warranted.

"Nonsense!" said Talcott stiffly. "You have been drinking."

"No, 'm not," said Purdy earnestly. "No 'm not. Had nothing to-day but something to ward off seasickness with a couple lifelong friends I met on the boat."

"Lifelong friends you never saw before!" said Talcott. He shrugged his shoulders. "However, you are your own master. But I wish you would shave and put on clean linen and keep yourself a credit to your profession in looks at least."

Purdy, a bit sobered by his chief's icy manner, rubbed his hand over his chin.

"Sure thing, chief," he mumbled apologetically. "I'll attend to all that."

He went out, swaying perilously, forgetting all about the speech by Dr. Talcott, which he had promised Mrs. Vandeventer.

Outside, he ran into that charming lady, accompanied by another old friend of his, a fat man who traveled extensively in the service of an American harvesting machinery corporation.

"Oh, you interesting man!" cried the lady. "Do come and tell me what Dr. Talcott said."

"I bear his apologies to you," said Purdy. "He is ill and cannot appear to-night."

"Oh, how screamingly unfortunate," exclaimed Mrs. Vandeventer. "He is so fascinating! Don't you love a mysterious man!"

"Huh!" grunted the harvester salesman.

They made their way to the cafe, a small screened-off part of the stuffy smoking-room.

Mrs. Vandeventer ordered a drink compounded of ginger ale and lemon juice; the men ordered whisky and soda.

"You must run into perfectly fascinating mysterious things away off in the desert," gushed the lady. "I had so hoped that Dr. Talcott would tell us some of them to-night."

"I'm sorry," said Purdy, "very ill!"

"Now I knew a charming man—a Frenchman—" said Mrs. Vandeventer. "He lived in Martinique, and he knew the most delightfully gruesome stories about the witchcraft there, what do they call it? Oh, yes, hoodoo!"

"Voodoo, you mean," said the harvester salesman.

"Oh, yes, voodoo! Well, it appears that if one person hates another person, all that he needs to do is to go to one of these witch doctors and he makes a small image of wax and puts it up in front of the fire and it melts and when the last bit is melted the person dies! Honestly! He gave me his word that he had seen it done!"

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"Nonense!" said the fat man. "Like as not the witch doctor sent around word that he was operating on the party and his imagination just got the better of him. Probably killed himself; paid to do so by the witch doctor."

"I could tell a tale," said Purdy, wagging his head mysteriously—so mysteriously that he almost forgot to cease wagging.

"Oh, do let us hear it!" screamed Mrs. Vandeventer. "Is it horrible and mysterious and everything!"

"It is," said Purdy, "all of that."

"Let's have it," said the fat man, "come on, trot it out!"

"Me!", almost shrieked Purdy. "Me tell it! Why, man! The person who tells this story is bound to die in twenty-four hours, absolutely bound to die within twenty-four hours. One of our men told it—"

"Well, did he die?" asked the fat man.

"He did," said Purdy.

"Coincidence," said the other. "I don't believe that stuff and neither do you. You are a scientist; I am a business man. Now take business. If things don't sell, there is a good reason, that's all."

"Grapenuts!" giggled Purdy and almost fell out of his chair. "Of course," he went on, "cause and effect. I am a scientist; expect to be elected to the Royal Geographic Society on the strength of what I have done in Samarkund."

"Samarkund," exclaimed Mrs. Vandeventer—"what a perfectly beautiful, delightful, mysterious name! Can't you imagine camels and antelopes and wild horses and horrible witchy things happening in a place like that!"

"Come on," said the fat man; "let's have the story."

"Not I," said Purdy.

"Afraid?"

"Sir," said Purdy, "you are insulting! I afraid! A man who has been through what I have been through! I am not afraid of anything on this earth, above it, or below it!"

"Prove it," said the fat man.

"Well, it was this way. We had a young fellow who found a tomb away off in the desert. Funny, it was Egyptian, and a thousand miles away from the Nile. He opened it, found a mummy-case and the story of the occupant. This is the story."

At the end of three minutes Mrs. Vandeventer screamed; put her hands to her ears, and ran away.

PURDY went on doggedly for fifteen minutes, interrupted only by changing glasses. At the end of that time he stopped, looked around triumphantly, and said thickly:

"Afraid! I? Afraid! Where's Mrs. What-do-you-call-'em?"

"Whew!" said the harvester man. "What rotten people they were in those days."

"What?" said Purdy sleepily.

The huge figure of Talcott loomed in the door. He stood for a moment looking uncertainly about, and then strode over and laid his hand on Purdy's shoulder.

"Purdy!" he said.

Purdy made no answer. His head was sinking lower and lower.

"He's been having a round or two with old King Al," said the harvester man. "Will you have a sniff yourself, doc?"

"No, thank you," said Talcott stiffly. "Purdy, you fool!"

"Ouch!" said Purdy. "Leggo."

Talcott dragged him to his feet and half carried him out to the deck. A heavy fog had settled, and above them sounded the melancholy, measured hoot of the fog-horn.

For half an hour Talcott marched his engineer briskly up and down the slippery deck.

At the end of that time the glassy look began to wear out of his eyes.

"Listen, Purdy," said Talcott, "I have had an important wireless which you ought to know about it. It is from Barbour, president of the society. He has been on the continent, and he says that there is some sort of trouble between Austria and Serbia, and that there is a chance of our being drawn in. Aren't you in the territorials?"

"Yes," said Purdy, passing his hand over his forehead. The worried look was coming back. "I'm captain in an engineer regiment."

"I thought you should know."

"Do you think England will be drawn in?"

"No," said Talcott, after a long pause. "The time is past for brutalities of that sort. Even if she is, reason will soon get the upper hand. It will amount to nothing."

He marched Purdy to the latter's stateroom.

"Good night," he said. "I think you had better stay here until morning."

"Good night," said Purdy, sitting on the edge of his bunk. The pucker between his brows deepened.

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He arose.

"Talcott! Good God!"

"Well?"

"For God's sake, don't leave me!"

"Why not?"

"I've gone and told that damned story!"

"About the princess?"

"Yes."

"And you are afraid?"

"My God, yes!"

"Purdy, when we go to London, I am going to recommend that you sever your connection with the Oriental Society. Are you sure, in the first place, that you told it?"

"Did I?" said Purdy, trying painfully hard to collect his thoughts. "Maybe I did not."

That night the ship ran onto a derelict. Talcott was awake in an instant, collected, deducing from the orders above and the drumming of feet on deck just what the danger was.

He ran to Purdy's stateroom and opened the door. It was not locked. Purdy was not there.

He made a circuit of the deck, but could not find him. The steerage passengers were swarming up the stairs to the boat-deck. An officer with a drawn pistol stood at the head of the stairs, keeping them back.

Talcott ran back to his stateroom and threw together the things which were most important. When he came back on deck, the boats had been lowered and lay about the ship in a pale ring of upturned faces. The fog lifted and lay above them in a white woolly sheet. The ship listed slightly to port, but did not settle.

Within an hour the passengers were back on the boat, and she was proceeding toward Liverpool, only six hours away, at half speed.

The only life lost was that of Purdy. He could not be found on the ship. Talcott waited a week in Liverpool, but gained no news of him. He gave him up for lost, went to London, submitted a preliminary report to the society, and journeyed on to his cottage near the east coast.

Wexham lay within a league of the sea—a small village of less than a hundred souls. About it rolled the treeless downs, crossed by one white road. A mile from the village stood Talcott's cottage, a low structure of wood and stone, surrounded by a stone wall as high as a man, banked with flourishing shrubs. At the back was a small garden, empty now, for Talcott had been gone a year, and a stable. A walk made of crushed shells ran from the road to the gate in the wall, and the other walks which crossed the garden were made of the same material.

Here he set to work on the report. It was already almost finished, for his care in taking notes had been so great that it was only a question of putting them in some sort of sequence. He worked undisturbed, for he had few callers—the doctor, the rector, and Edmunds, the constable, who had been in charge of the place during his absence.

The inevitable question arose as to whether or not he should print the story of the princess. His first impulse was to tell it; but, after all, there might be something in the thing. It had certainly worked twice. If he turned the thing loose on the world and there was a power for evil in it, he would be eternally responsible.

Characteristically, he gave a day to the consideration of the problem, with the firm resolve to make up his mind at the end of that day. He spent it on the downs walking across them to the sea, and along the sands that were cold and wet in the shadow of the white cliffs that towered above them. All day he tramped, lunching at an inn. But when he turned homeward, the customary decision was lacking in his walk. He dawdled along, switching at the gorse with a heavy walking stick. He had come to no decision. At his gate he paused, reminded of his promise to settle the question.

"I will do it," he said aloud; "it is my duty. And who can believe that these things were anything but coincidence!"

In the house he found a message from London telling him to come at once. The name—Vandeventer—meant nothing to him at first. Then he remembered the foolish, simpering creature on the boat.

The message said it was a matter of life and death, and he went up to London, depressed, irritated at this new invasion on the serenity of life.

HE FOUND Mrs. Vandeventer in a house full of sisters and aunts and other women, all in tears. One worried-looking doctor was in charge. Talcott answered very bruskly the storm of talk that came upon him from the women and shut himself up with the doctor.

"Why was I sent for?" he demanded.

"Well, sir, it is a most peculiar case. Do you know anything about a princess named Nalinthia?"

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"Yes," said Talcott calmly, "I do."

"The lady came home here with some cock-and-bull story which she said she heard on the boat from some one in your party. I believe there was a penalty for repeating it, wasn't there?"

"Yes," was the calm reply; "death within twenty-four hours."

"Well, from what I gathered from the ladies here, she knew a part of it. She kept it to herself as long as she could, but the strain became too great and she babbled it all out one evening by the fire here. The next morning she felt this sickness coming on, and thought it was the penalty. She went quite out of her head and has been more or less crazy ever since."

"Any other symptoms?" asked Talcott after a silence of a few minutes.

The doctor shrugged his black-clad shoulders.

"Well, yes. Some fever. Increased blood pressure, of course. Delirium; but I give you my word, I do not know whether it is or is not insanity."

"Insanity as a penalty for telling part of the story?" murmured Talcott. "Impossible!

"May I see the lady?" he asked abruptly.

"Yes, certainly."

They went through the weeping throng at the door, up the broad stairs and into a dark bedroom.

Mrs. Vandeventer lay with an ice-pack at her head. The physician lifted the shade and Talcott bent over restless figure.

The pretty, foolish face was flushed and a constant babble of talk escaped her. Her eyes, light blue and very bright, were wide open, gazing this way and that, but seeing nothing.

The doctor shoo khis head.

"I think that all is being done that can be done. I called you in the hope that you might know something more about this than is apparent to the eyes. As for the permanency of this condition, that we must wait for time to show."

Talcott escaped through the ring of questioning women at the door and walked away from the house, head bent, brows knitted. Here was a new twist to the situation. Death for telling the story! Insanity for telling half of it!

His depression deepened. He walked the streets until eight o'clock, dined, walked again, undecided as to what he should do. London irritated him; this continual darkening of the streets against an improbable air raid made it so difficult to get about.

He remembered a note that he carried in his pocket about a matter concerning Egyptian decoration that he wished to look up. The note gave the name of an author famous for his explorations in Egypt and the title of a book known to the world as the authoritative work on Egyptian decoration.

He stopped short and struck his hands together.

"Stupid! Why did I not think of this before."

He stopped under a dimly burning gas light and ran through the names in his address book.

"Brandon, that's the name," he said with satisfaction, noted the address, and set off at top speed to find his man.

Brandon lived in a gloomy house which faced a dingy park. A dim gas light burned in the hall; Talcott pulled the bell and heard a harsh jingle somewhere in the depths of the building. Brandon himself answered the door, a slight man with shining, bald brow, and a slim, white hand that was lost in Talcott's hearty grip.

"And whom have I the honor of seeing?" murmured Brandon, a bit suspicious.

His suspicion thawed out as Talcott named himself and spoke of a meeting some years ago at a scientific congress in Copenhagen. He led the way into a dark, paneled library, lined with books on spiritualism and all the other isms which have to do with the survival of a life after death.

For thrills and adventure, don't miss "D.O.A.", starring Edmond O'Brien and Pamela Britton, and "Quicksand", starring Mickey Rooney and Jeanne Cagney! They'll be at your neighborhood theater soon!

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"I came to you on a matter of business," said Talcott abruptly, refusing the chair which the other drew up for him. "I have had a matter on my mind for some time. It has caused me considerable worry, for I have not known just how much to believe. As I was walking the streets tonight, I remembered a notation that I made while in the country, relative to looking up a detail of Egyptian decoration in Rheinhardt's great work on that subject. Suddenly I asked myself why I went to Rheinhardt. And the answer is, of course, that he is the one who knows more about these things than any one. Persons wishing to know about Samarkund will come to me, and persons like myself who wish to know anything about psychical matters, come to you."

"Of course there is a distinction," said Brandon, who had been watching his visitor with keen, but veiled interest. "You remember that Kant said the three problems which human beings can never settle are God, immortality, and freedom of the will."

"Exactly," said Talcott, "but you more than any other man are able to say whether or not there is anything in a curse made some twenty-five centuries ago which can operate to-day."

"WELL," said Brandon slowly, "that is a hard question. Undoubtedly there have been cases in which it seemed as though things of that sort continued to be powerful. But in those cases science has not had a chance to apply her rules to the game. I know of few cases in things of that sort which, when put to the test of science, have not turned out to be fakes of one sort and another. I have here an interesting collection of such." He waved his hand toward the darker half of the room and Talcott saw glass cases filled with spirit trumpets, wooden toes for knocking, phosphoric masks and other apparatus for the seance.

"Are there any cases in which science has not been able to get at the bottom of the matter?" demanded Talcott.

"Yes, there have been some in which cause and effect as we know them have not seemed to apply. Notice that I say as we know them, for science is always taking to itself false science and legitimatizing it. Time was when Mesmerism was such a false science, and mesmeric demonstrations might well have been called witchcraft. But in time it became a valuable and true science."

He waited for his visitor to answer, but Talcott was silent, his heavy brows knitted in thought.

"Of course," Brandon went on, "as to the matter of the curse, there are all sorts of cults now which believe that thought is an active, living thing, independent of the thinking person. Their whole effort is to put themselves in contact with healthy, happy, prosperous currents of thought. They would undoubtedly say that a curse might live as a part of an evil current of thought and whoever put himself in contact with that evil current, consciously or unconsciously, would feel the effects of the curse. Perhaps," he finished delicately, "a concrete instance might help me to a decision."

"Do you remember Williamson," his caller asked abruptly, "a young man who was with me at the Copenhagen congress in nineteen-twelve?"

"Quite well," said Brandon. "A splendid chap."

"He found a tomb in the desert at Anarshan, a little oasis about eight miles from Samarkund. He opened it, found a superb mummy-case there. In it was the body of a girl who had been carried away from her home by the Nile. She suffered untold cruelties. She killed herself and left a record of her story in order that she might be avenged by her sweetheart, who was to come from Egypt to take that revenge. At the foot of the manuscript was an injunction against repeating this story, for such things should not be in the minds of men. And as a threat, she said that a sign had been given her by the god Anubis that whoever told the story would die within twenty-four hours.

"Williamson said nothing about this parchment for several days. Then he came to me and asked me whether or not he should tell the story, because his report would be incomplete without it. He was not afraid of the curse, understand, but he felt that the girl had put him on his honor. I did not directly persuade him to tell the story, but I am sure than I am more or less responsible for his doing so. He told it to Purdy and me. Within twenty-four hours, twenty-three to be exact, he was dead, probably from a fall from his horse.

"Coming across on the boat Purdy got himself drunk and blabbed the story out to a woman and a man. I do not know who the man was, but the woman was Mrs. Vandeventer, whose name you have undoubtedly heard."

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"Yes," nodded Brandon, "a rather pretty, giggling sort of person."

"Exactly. The ship ran onto a derelict within six hours from the English coast; all hands were put off in boats, floated around for a time in a calm sea, and then came back on board. That is, all except Purdy. Somewhere in the shuffle he was lost, and I have no doubt that he was killed. I have heard nothing of him."

"Extraordinary!"

"And that is not all. This Mrs. Vandeventer heard only part of the story. You will understand that no woman would care to listen to it in the presence of men. She hurried away before it was finished. However, she knew the prohibition attached, kept it to herself as long as she possibly could, and then babbled the thing out to her sisters. She is now more or less a maniac, with doubtful chances of recovery."

"Extraordinary!" murmured Brandon again. He was silent for a time, looking at the tall, strong figure in front of him.

"You are not afraid for yourself, of course," he said finally. "The problem is whether or not you ought to turn such a thing loose on the world. If it were not for the command at the end, you might do it, but just as soon as people were told that they must not repeat the yarn, they would all be doing so."

"My report will be incomplete without it," said Talcott. "My impulse is, of course, to disregard the command and tell the story. My whole nature rebels against accepting any such restriction. But if there is power for evil in this curse, it is obviously my duty not to let it go farther than it has gone already."

"I can come to no decision on it," said Brandon. But he added, looking obliquely at his caller, "There is one way of settling it and that is the only way that I can see."

Talcott raised his head and met the eyes of his host squarely.

"I have thought of that," he said.

"Of course," ruminated Brandon, his eyes alight with the excitement of the thing, "you would be a great loss to the scientific world. Practically, it is absurd to think of telling the story just to see whether or not it works; scientifically, it is an experiment of inestimable value.

"You have nerve and physique. Where are you living?"

"I have a cottage near Wexham on the east coast."

"Ideal! If you were in London you might be run over by a bus or fall down a manhole, of be shot by some of these amateur soldiers. At Wexham every possible outside influence would be eliminated.

"When could we go down?"

"In the morning."

"Is there any one else we could get? Three observers are better than two. Two are better than one, I should say, for you yourself can scarcely be classed as an observer."

Talcott meditated for a moment.

"Yes," he said, "there is Edmunds, who has been watching my place while I have been gone. He is an old soldier; at present constable."

"Ideal!" exclaimed Brandon. "Was there ever such an experiment?"

A moment later he added, "What children men can be when they are interested in a thing! It is nonsense to think of your taking any risk. Let us drop the thing!"

"I shall go through with it," replied the other calmly.

Brandon looked at the deep-set blue eyes, the short, determined nose, the strong lines of jaw beneath the short beard.

"I can see that you are not one to be persuaded," he said, "and I will admit that I am not interested in persuading you to give this up."

"I have a duty," said Talcott calmly, "a twofold duty—partly to those who have gone before me and partly to science."

Talcott had telegraphed Edmunds to meet them at the station with a conveyance and he was there, touching his hat respectfully as they dismounted from the train. They drove across the mile of white road that separated Talcott's cottage from the village. Away to their left they could see the blue sparkle of the sea and over the fragant downs came a strong breeze, with a tang of salt in it.

Ahead of them Talcott's cottage and stable nestled in a low mass, scarcely distinguishable from the country about it. Brandon took in the sun, the strong breeze, and the treeless country.

"Not much of a place for ghosts, is it? I would be out of a job down here."

"Very interesting subject," said Edmunds, touching his cap. "I 'ave read Mr. Brandon's name in connection with the reports of the psychical society."

"Indeed!" said Brandon. "Interested in that sort of thing, Edmunds?"

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"Not exactly hinterested, sir, but I 'ave seen some strange things in India."

"You are just our man," replied the other. "I suppose Talcott has told you that there is to be an experiment along that line to-day."

"Something of that sort was 'inted at in his telegram," replied the constable.

THEY drew up in front of the cottage and Edmunds took out their bags. Brandon exclaimed over the cheery interior, light walls, many windows now open to the warm breeze, bare brown floor, fireplace, books.

He was in favor of starting the ball rolling by having Talcott reel off the story at once. But Edmunds, once he understood the situation, interposed meekly, "Begging your pardon, sir, but I must get the horse back to the village and tend to some little legal matters. Also, I suggest that the story be told at midnight. It will be a strain, sirs, although you may laugh now. If it is told at midnight, it will give us a greater variety of night and day—a short spell of night, then a long spell of day and another short spell of night. And night will be the 'ard time, I take it."

The advantage of such an arrangement was quickly seen and Edmunds drove away, to return at a quarter before twelve that night.

As the clock rang the three chimes for that hour there was the rasp of hobnails outside and Edmund's knock at the door. He came in wrapped in a oilskin.

"A bit thick outside, gentlemen, a bit thick. A fine night for deviltry of any sort. We shall need to keep a close watch."

He took off his slicker and helmet, displaying an army pistol reposing in a holster, rich brown from wear, but polished with all the care which an old trooper of the queen could lavish on his equipment.

"Will you have something to drink, Edmunds?" asked Brandon.

"No, thank you, sir," said the constable respectfully. "You can't tell what may turn up here, and we ought to be ready for anything. Cool 'eads and steady 'ands, that's the ticket, sir, on a night like this."

"By George, you are right," said Brandon, and put back the decanter, which he had taken from a triangular cupboard that stood in the corner.

The clock hands drew toward twelve. There was a whirr of wheels and the chimes rang out—four peals for the quarter and then twelve slow strokes for the hour.

Edmunds and Brandon sat in chairs drawn up front of the fire. Talcott rose and stood in front of them. As the last heavy note died away, his rich, strong voice began.

"This is the story of Nalinthia, daughter of Notki, priest of Anubis."

For fifteen minutes the room resounded to his voice.

Then he stopped; the clock rang a peal for the quarter.

The story was told.

Edmunds cleared his throat.

"My word, sir, living in Hengland 'as its blessings, 'asn't it, sir? Things like that could not 'appen 'ere and now. Law and order, gentlemen, that's the ticket, law and order."

"Curious tale," said Brandon. "Now to see what's the result. I hate to think of staying awake all night without any stimulus whatever."

"Beg pardon, gentlemen," said Edmunds respectfully, "but my advice is that we stand watch turn and about, as it were. If we get no sleep at all, to-morrow night at this time we will be seeing all sorts of things that ain't there at all. I will go on from now until four in the morning, Mr. Brandon can stand watch from four until eight, Mr. Talcott from eight till twelve, and then we can start all over again. Those who are not on watch can sleep."

"Edmunds," exclaimed Brandon, "you are the prince of constables!"

"Thank you, sir. You gentlemen can go to sleep here. I will be going in and out at about 'alf hour intervals, so do not be disturbed if you 'ear me. Sort of patrol as it were."

Talcott pulled out the cot from his sleeping alcove; Brandon lay on it fully dressed. His host spread a blanket on the floor. The lights were put out; Edmunds took his position by the fireplace in a straight-backed chair. The red light of the fire touched the forms of the two reclining men and the keen, lined face of the old trooper. In the corner the face of the clock took on a rosy tint from the fire, and its ticking with the intermittent cracking of the coal in the fireplace were the only sounds.

When the two peals on the chimes rang for the half-hour, Edmunds slipped outside and made the circuit of the place. He was back again within five minutes, for the grounds were so small as to be easily encompassed in that time. The mist was still heavy outside; he came in dripping.

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At the end of the first half-hour, Talcott's deep breathing told that he was asleep. Brandon's eyes were shut, but a telltale flutter now and then and his constant turning indicated that he had not found it so easy to forget the threat that hung over Talcott.

Each peal of the chimes he heard, and each time Edmunds went out he opened his eyes drowsily and watched him go. Four times the constable had gone, and the clock was striking half after two. Edmunds arose, slipped on his rainproof and tiptoed softly out of the door.

In a moment there came a shout, a pistol shot and the sound of a falling body.

Brandon reared up in bed, calling helplessly, "Talcott! Talcott!"

The latter rose from the floor, instantly awake, cool, self-possessed.

"There was a shot outside," cried Brandon, "and somebody fell!"

His host seized the heavy poker that stood by the fire, went to the shutter in his sleeping alcove, opened it, and slipped out into the night.

In a moment he came back through the door, half carrying the constable. The latter's face was terribly cut up; he was blinded by blood that poured into his eyes from a half dozen savage cuts in his forehead. Otherwise he was uninjured and his cool voice was saying:

"Didn't see which way it went, sir, whatever it was. Don't be alarmed, sir, my eyes are all right. Just can't see where I am going. Don't forget to bolt the door; there is some deviltry in the wind."

Brandon stared helplessly while Talcott tended the wounds on his side. He washed them carefully, examined them by the fierce light of an electric torch. All the time the cool voice of the wounded man was running on.

"I had just come out of the door, gentlemen, and my eyes were still a bit puckered up by the change from light to dark. I stood just under the eaves around the corner from the door, when something struck me. It may have been from above or from below or from in front. It may have been a man or a beast. It was inky dark and it occurred so quickly that I knew nothing except that my face was being chewed up. Whatever it was, it was gone in the flash of an eye."

"I am sorry, gentlemen, not to have seen more clearly."

"What do you think?" asked Brandon of Talcott.

"It must have been done by a man armed with some fiendish weapon," said Talcott slowly. "We have no animals in Wexham that could make such marks."

It was still dark outside; their routine of standing watch was broken up. Brandon should have gone on, but one look at his concerned face told Talcott that he was not the man to patrol the place in the dark hours of a misty morning.

He took upon himself the labor of watching until dawn.

WHEN he returned from his second round he found Brandon watching the constable with a puzzled look. The old man was sitting bolt upright in his chair.

"Right wheel!" he said sharply. "Load with ball!"

"What is it, Edmunds?" asked Talcott.

The other paid no attention, but broke into a babble of meaningless talk.

"Orders for the day are to let no one pass this white post," he said rapidly. "Corporal of the guard! Relief, number three! Steady my man, take it easy. A deep breath and a light touch at the trigger. You got him!"

Edmunds jumped up from his chair, but Talcott caught him by the shoulders and pushed him back. He forced his head back. The bandages covered most of his face; what was visible was angry red, and the eyes were pulled almost shut.

"Get me warm water and my medical kit from the corner cupboard."

He unwrapped the bandages, which were pulled tightly by the swelling of Edmunds' wounds. Each scratch was turning black on its edges, the wounded man's head was grotesquely puffed.

Talcott made a tourniquet and bound it lightly about his patient's head. Then he compressed each wound, washed it time and time again. Edmunds ceased his babble and slumped down in his chair.

"What is it?" asked Brandon, who had been doing nothing but wet fresh cloths, for each one that had been used was thrown upon the fire.

Talcott looked at him vaguely.

He had almost forgotten the existence of Brandon.

"Poison of some sort. He was cut with a poisoned knife of some sort."

He lifted the chunky figure of the wounded man in his arms and laid him out on the cot.

"Brandon," he said rapidly, "you will have to go to the village. Wake up the men

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at the inn first, get some sort of conveyance and bring the doctor back with you. Edmunds must have good care, and we cannot give it to him here."

When Brandon opened the door to go out, the dawn was already showing whitely through the mist.

Alone with his charge, Talcott worked feverishly to keep up the failing pulse. At quarter-hour intervals, he loosened the tourniquet for a few moments. The bathing and compressing of the wounds he did not cease. The constable lay in a coma, silent, inert, scarcely breathing. His face was turned almost entirely black.

Suddenly Talcott paused, straightened himself up.

Somewhere in the back of his mind an answering chord responded faintly to the sight of the dark and swollen face before him. Once he had seen such a sight—cheeks black, eyes puffed shut, head crushed from crown to brow.

It was Williamson, as he had lain in the crevice of rock near the road to Anarshan!

His mind leaped upon this slender bit of evidence, while his body went mechanically through the process of wrapping his patient in blankets, forcing brandy between his lips, and then putting hot bricks at his feet.

Was there a connection there? Could he be sure that Williamson had suffered something of this sort, or had be been dragged by his horse?

The matter was still milling around in his mind when Brandon returned with the doctor and a carriage.

The constable was breathing more deeply, the blue color had gone from his lips; if he suffered no reaction, the doctor decided, he would live.

When it was decided that he could be moved, it was well on into the morning. Edmunds spoke rationally.

"My 'ead is very 'eavy," he said. "My word, sir, I think I owe my life to you."

"You had a very narrow escape," said the doctor. "If it had not been for the prompt cleansing of the wounds and tourniquet, which kept the poison out of your heart, you would have been a gone man. Extra-ordinary," he said. "Is this England or is this the Orient?"

Talcott answered his question very shortly, telling him nothing of the experiment that was under way. He left Brandon in charge of the house and rode off to the village with Edmunds. He wanted to get a gun of some sort, for one thing; a pistol is accurate up to twenty feet; but whatever there was roaming the moors might need to be downed at longer range than that.

He started back across the downs at noon. Everywhere the mist lay, thick, dripping fog. Over the rolling land came the boom of fog-horns along the coast, and he heard the piping cry of unseen birds wheeling above him. Ahead of him the road slid into sight scarce a dozen feet away; on either side the downs faded into gray mist.

A breeze fanned the fog gently. It brought to his nostrils the pungent odor of smoke. He quickened his pace and as he drew near his own property the smoke odor thickened. He saw a red glow through the mist, and broke into a run. His cottage was burning!

His first thought was for Brandon and he dashed open the door. The room was full of swirling smoke. Brandon was lying fully dressed on the cot, sleeping heavily.

Talcott picked him up bodily and carried him out into the garden. He propped him up against the wall and turned to fighting the fire. One corner of the building which contained his sleeping quarters was in flames; evidently it had started close to the ground.

He seized an ax and tore the burning timbers from the house and tossed them into the dripping bushes where they blazed harmlessly. A pump stood in the garden and a tub. From this he threw water on to the small blaze that was left. The roof was too wet to burn. Steam curled up from it, but the flames that licked up there soon died out.

THREE quarters of the cottage was intact; one corner gaped with a great black hole, showing the comfortable interior, sleeping alcove, and beyond, chairs drawn up in front of the fire, blue dishes on a table, a small jar of gorse in the corner.

He turned to Brandon who was sitting up, passing his hand over his brow.

"What is it?" he said weakly. "A fire?"

"No," said his host somewhat impatiently, "a picnic."

"I must have fallen asleep," said Brandon, "the first I knew I came to out here. Everything was all right before. I was tired and lay down for a moment.

He struggled to his feet.

"Ouch!" he said, and burst into a fit of coughing. "I must have breathed some of that smoke into my lungs. They are very painful."

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"I hope you feel all right otherwise," said Talcott. "I hope there is no such thing as poisoned smoke."

"You don't think there is!" cried Brandon.

"Of course not," was the reply. "Had there been, you would be dead now. But I think that from the looks you had better go to the village and go to bed with your windows wide open."

"And leave you here alone?" protested Brandon feebly.

"Yes," said Talcott, "this is my problem, and I ought to see it through alone. There is no reason why any one else should take any risk. When I consented to your coming, I did not think that things would turn out as they have."

Brandon took his traveling bag, shook hands with his host, and walked away.

The daylight ended early; at six it was murky and dark as night. Talcott dined, washed his dishes, put his bed back into the alcove, and swept the place free from bits of blackened timber. He stirred up the fire and sat down in front of it. Near his hand leaned a fowling piece; he had not been able to get a rifle in the village.

As he sat gazing into the coals, the whole affair of the tomb at Anarshan passed before him, in pictures formed by the shifting colors in the fire. He saw young Williamson standing at the edge of the oasis, waving his sun helmet, and shouting, "Come on, sir, a big find!" And then the night in front of his tent, the boy sitting just at the edge of the white light thrown from his acetylene lamp, saying, "Not that I am afraid of the threat, but I rather felt that she was putting me on my honor." Then Purdy had drifted in and the boy had reeled off the story and Purdy had blurted out his ridiculous fear.

Ridiculous? Could he call Purdy's fear ridiculous when the scene reproduced itself before him: the boy lying in a crevice just off the road, his head crushed and blackened?

Then came Purdy's obstinate drunkenness on the ship, the collision and the white ring of boats lying about the heeling vessel, Purdy's empty stateroom, his hunt for him about the ship, and the days of waiting in Liverpool.

In his mind's eye he saw the simpering face of Mrs. Vandeventer under the white edge of the ice-pack and heard her high voice babbling on.

Outside he heard a low roar coming from the sea. A wind was up, scouring across the treeless downs. It struck his house and the sturdy little structure trembled beneath the blow. The dripping of the fog from the roof ceased, and as he went to the window to secure a banging shutter, he saw the fog running before the wind in long, gray streaks.

He went back to his place by the fire and the low, steady roar of the wind outside brought back to him the sound of his own voice as he stood there at the last midnight, telling the story of Nalinthia. Twenty of his allotted hours had already gone; the clock had just ceased booming the hour of eight.

What if the dead hand of this girl could reach across twenty-seven centuries and touch him! What if somewhere or somehow Nalinthia was still Nalinthia; her command a living thing, jealously kept by some power beyond the physical, yet working through it. For the death of Williamson had been accomplished by physical means, so probably had the death of Purdy. About Mrs. Vandeventer he could not be sure; she might have thought herself into a state of approaching insanity. What if somewhere the feud went on between Nalinthia and her persecutors!

And then almost on the heels of his telling the story had come the wounding of Edmunds, ghastly cuts that swelled and blackened almost within the hour. And after that the fire and the narrow escape of Brandon from death by smoke strangulation.

The wind strengthened; the curtain that hung between the living room and his sleeping-alcove stood straight out, struck a small jar of gorse that stood on his bookshelves, and sent it rolling and crashing across the floor. He arose and turned toward the black opening of his sleeping-room. A strong blast of air swept through the opening made by the fire of the afternoon.

And in that opening, which yawned blackly into the outer night, flashed a pair of sinister green eyes.

Talcott stood while the eyes drew near through the darkness, disembodied, for he could see nothing but them, changing from green to red and back. He leaped back, seized the fowling-piece, and fired once from the hip. He jumped back into the shadow.

A cry rang out above the roar of the wind—a cry that he had heard before—a sound that began as a low wail and sharpened to a scream of animal anguish. A yellow body came hurtling through the air toward him and he fired again. There

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was the thump of a heavy body falling.

Talcott leaped to the door, bolted it, bolted the windows, fastened the curtain down by laying the heavy poker across the lower edge, an turned to his find.

On the floor lay something between a house-cat and leopard as to size; in color it was an even, dirty yellow. Its back was broken, and its legs lay in a curious, sprawled, impotent attitude. The ragged ears lay flat against the sinister, snakelike head, and the eyes, slowly glazing, looked up at him through slanting lids with incredible ferocity.

He stood watching until the twitching of the yellow body ceased. Exultation was in his eyes; he broke into a laugh of triumph. For here was the starting-point on which he could build up a structure of reasoning. He had heard that cry before—as he was mounting his horse to leave the waste sands of Samarkund. There was the point on which he could begin. He quoted the axiom of Archimedes, rolling out the sonorous Greek periods, "Give me but a place to rest my lever, and I will unhinge the universe!"

THE body was quite lifeless by now; he lifted it and placed it on the table under the lamp. It was emaciated; the ribs protruded through the thick, matted fur, but even so it was a heavy weight. The head was small, with strong, vicious jaws, the legs were long and strongly muscled. He gazed at it, searching in his memories of natural history for some clue to its identity. It was too large for a common house-cat, although he knew that in the Orient, where such animals are bred with care, they reach proportions unknown to the housewives of England. It was too small to be a leopard, and the smooth color of the coat precluded any possibility of its being such. There were no tufts to the ears, therefore it could not be any sort of a lynx.

He turned to his books and ran through a number which had to do with the Orient. In one he came across a picture, showing a group of animals such as this one. It was an artist's sketch; not that of a scientist, and showed these animals standing by a riverbank with a heron under the paw of one.

"Desert cat," read the title under the picture, "common to Egypt. These creatures are supposed to be descendants of the ancient temple cats. They live in bands and hunt so. Surly, ferocious, have been known to attack men. The natives sometimes train them for hunting birds, but on account of the sullen disposition, this is rarely successful."

He turned and looked at the yellow splotch under the light.

"Egypt in Samarkund again," he mused.

There was a knock at his door; because of the increasing violence of the wind outside, he had heard no footsteps on the walk.

He put the animal out of sight, and opened the door. A blast of air swept in, and with it a boy from the village. Talcott had to throw his whole weight against the door to close it again; he could hear the tumbling of the surf coming on the wind.

The boy had a message from Edmunds saying that he was doing well and was sorry not to be with Talcott, another from Brandon expressing the same regret and adding that if the wind went down he would drive out later, provided the doctor would come with him.

There was also a letter from London written by Mrs. Vandeventer's physician saying that a famous specialist had identified the lady's trouble as an obscure Oriental fever evidently contracted on her way to England. Her mind was impaired; there were doubts as to her ever being sane again, but such was the natural course of the malady under which she suffered.

"Terrible night, sir," said the boy. "The steeple is down at the church and the rectory orchard is all up by the roots."

"Too bad," murmured Talcott absently and tipped the boy. He slipped out into the howling night and the scientist returned to the problem before him.

Another step which would prove that everything that had to do with the telling of the story was coincidence! Mrs. Vandeventer had not been made insane because she told the story, but because she had contracted a definite form of sickness.

He put the cat upon the table again, raised one foot and pressed upon the pad of the foot gently. Claws, long and keen pushed out in a sinister half-circle. Without the aid of his reading-glass he could see that they had been smeared with some yellowish black venom.

"Some one brought you to England!" he exclaimed, his voice deep with exultation.

The wind moaned hoarsely as it raced overhead. The curtain broke loose from its mooring and stood straight out in the room. Talcott left it so, unbolted the windows, unlocked the door and sat down in front of the fire. The fire glowed and flickered in the strong draft. Outside the wind raced over the downs and dashed

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against the walls of his house, bringing with it bits of stone that pattered like hailstones. The far-off sound of the surf, which on quiet days was no more than a murmur, had deepened to a thunderous roar.

The clock struck half-after nine.

He pictured to himself the death of young Williamson; this animal springing upon him, and then the mad plunging of his horse and the boy catapulted over the beast's head.

The clock ticked around to ten, to half-past, and still the storm strengthened outside until the wind flew past with a melancholy scream. The firelight played over the motionless figure of the man and shone upon the glazed, sinister slits which stood for the eyes of the beast upon the table.

Suddenly Talcott jumped to his feet, whirled about, and struck once with the heavy poker that lay close at hand. Once more he bolted the door and the shutters and moored the curtain to the floor; this time with a heavy chair. Then he turned back into the room with exultation gleaming in his eyes.

Back of his chair lay a slim, brown man, thin, looking emaciated in the cast-off European clothes which he wore. At his side lay a curved knife. Talcott picked it up gracefully. Its keen edge was dark with the same cruel venom that had been smeared on the claws of the cat. He threw the knife into the fire, plunging the blade deep into the glowing coals.

His captive's hat had fallen off, showing a smooth long head, a straight nose finely formed, a small full lipped mouth and a round chin. He was not of the brown color which was characteristic of the natives about Samarkund; there was a coppery tint to the skin.

Talcott's brows knitted.

"Egyptian features," he said, "if I know anything about the inhabitants of that land. That slim head and straight nose are certainly not characteristic of any other Oriental race."

HE BOUND the feet and hands of the unconscious man with fine strong cord, passing the bonds about the hands just below the roots of the fingers. There was a welt on the smooth head, but he had not struck out to kill. A touch on the thin chest told him that his captive still lived.

He looked in triumph from the cat to the man and back. The first had almost got him; the second he had deliberately played for, leaving all avenues of entrance open and trusting the mirrorlike surface of the chimney-piece to tell him when anything came up behind him.

The slim, brown body twitched, moved; almond eyes opened and looked up at him blankly. Then hate blazed up in them; the native whipped himself over and snapped at his captor's leg.

Talcott sidestepped and then threw the body of the dead cat beside the other. The face writhed into an expression of animal grief at sight of the lifeless body.

"What has happened to this foul thing will happen to you!" said the scientist, speaking in the tongue which was used about Samarkund. "I must know of the young effendi and the engineer effendi!"

There was no answer and he could not be sure that he had been understood. He took the fowling-piece, slipped a cartridge into it, and placed the muzzle against the head of his prisoner.

"I must know!" he said.

The eyes closed and the face became as calm as a graven image. The lips moved as if in prayer. Talcott bent close, and although the sound of the wind outside made the voice almost inaudible, heard that he was praying, and in the tongue of the Samarkund region.

"That is all I wanted to know," he said, putting the fowling piece back by the fireplace; "whether or not you understood me."

"I must know!" he went on. "By you men have lost their lives and there must be an accounting. You do not fear death; you fear pain. I swear that you will suffer the pangs of those in hell if you do not tell."

Still there was no answer.

He slipped the cleaning-rod of his pistol through the fine cord that went about the thin knuckles of his captive. He gave the rod a turn, and the cord cut deep into the hands, and the slender bones of the hand crunched. The body writhed in pain.

"Tell me."

Still there was silence. For a quarter of an hour he kept the pressure unrelaxed; as the clock was striking eleven, the native burst into a flood of cursing and wailing.

The sweat was pouring from Talcott's forehead as he arose. This sort of thing sickened him, but it must be done, and he had seen it through with all the thoroughness at his command.

"Tell me!" he said and pointed to the cat.

"It is mine," wailed the brown man,

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"mine. I brought it with me across the sea. Two of you have felt its claws."

"And who are those two?"

"The foolish young effendi who opened the tomb and the one who has gone back to the village to die."

"He will not die," said Talcott; "he will live and will see that you are punished. He is of the law. Why did you kill the young effendi?"

"He broke into the sacred tomb." The native laughed shrilly, a laugh that mingled with the hideous chorus of the wind.

"He broke into the sacred tomb. He was near to death when first he entered it, for if the slab had fallen more quickly, his feet would have been crushed."

Talcott looked down with loathing into the maniacal face with its rolling eyes, and lips drawn back over brown teeth.

"Did you kill the young effendi?"

"I did not strike him! I swear it! He felt the claws of this one and then his horse plunged and he fell."

"Beast!" cried Talcott. "You set this thing to hunt him. You will suffer!"

"I am not afraid to die."

"But you shall suffer. What became of the engineer effendi?"

"He was a fool! I struck him once when the ship was shaking, and he fell into the water."

"And what of the laughing lady on the ship?"

"Of her I know nothing!"

"Tell me," said Talcott in a terrible voice. He placed the heel of his boot on the slender hand. The face of the native turned ashen and his tobacco brown eyes rolled in apprehension.

"Of her I know nothing! She came among us with the engineer effendi and laughed at us. One of us was sick. He touched her."

Here was how Mrs. Vandeventer had contracted the obscure Oriental fever. Talcott turned away for a moment. Another link in the chain of evidence, and another fact to disprove the theory that to tell the story entailed a penalty.

"And what other things have you done?"

The native lay exhausted. Strange lands and strange food had weakened him. When he spoke again, Talcott could scarcely hear him above the hideous chorus which the wind made outside.

"It was I who brought liquor to the camp at Samarkund. I paid two of those pigs to kill you. And the fire in this house I started."

There was still the question of why this Egyptian looking face should be near Samarkund.

"Of what race are you?"

"I am not of the pigs who were at Samarkund. My ancestors were river gods and sacred cats."

The river god, Talcott thought, could be nothing but the Nile; the cat was sacred only in ancient Egypt. His mind harked back to the lover of Nalinthia who was to take vengeance on her persecutors.

"And did one of them do a great deed of blood in the country of Samarkund, after leaving his own land?"

"That he did, and took a wife of the people of his own land. His sons have guarded the sacred tomb at Anarshan ever since. There is always one, and when he dies another takes the duty upon him."

"And what of him who tells the tale of her that was in the tomb?" demanded Talcott.

The blank stare came back at him.

"Of that I know nothing, nor of her that was in the tomb. It is sacred."

"Why did you come for me?"

"You were one of those who broke open the sacred place, and it is our duty to take vengeance for that."

"Where is your city?"

"That I will never tell, nor where our dead lie buried, not burned, as is the custom of the pigs about Samarkund!"

Triumphantly the scientist looked at the clock. It was a quarter before twelve and the three peals on the chimes sounded faintly in the din that went on outside. The wind had been steadily mounting; the shutters shivered, and the latch of the door clacked as gusts of wind swept against the heavy panels.

Within fifteen minutes his time would be up!

HE mused on the strangeness of the thing, and felt joy that Nalinthia's wrongs had been avenged. Her sweetheart had done a great deed of blood in Samarkund—undoubtedly the murder of the human jackals who had abducted her. Then for twenty-seven centuries his people had guarded her tomb. There must be a city of them—hidden away in the rocky hills somewhere. He thought of the houses built in the Egyptian fashion, dotting some valley surrounded by hills, of the galleries of mummied figures there must be there, awaiting the return of the soul.

He looked at the clock again. Ten more minutes and his time would be up!

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He had settled the threat forever—laid its ghost—so that he could publish the story of Nalinthia and people could tell it again and again without fear. Cause and effect—cause and effect had been responsible for all the strange things which had puzzled him—cause and effect working in material channels.

Outside the wind arose in a long melancholy shriek. The house tottered under the blow; the heavy chair that held down the curtain in his sleeping-alcove overturned with a crash and the cloth was snapped from its fastenings. Talcott was almost blown flat by the rushing current of wind that stormed into the room. With it came bits of stone, of timber, of uptorn gorse from the downs. The roof creaked under the inblowing blast and seemed to rise a fraction of an inch.

The blast sank. The running roar of the sea seemed to be at his very door. He turned to straighten the chair, and there was a roar as another blast came running over the downs. This time the latch of the door gave way and the panel swung round with a crash, breaking into two long splinters as it struck against the stone doorpost.

The shutters sprang outward and were borne off on the wings of the wind. A long crack appeared in the ceiling with a splitting roar. The windows fell in with a jingle of breaking glass, and the house groaned almost humanly as the roof moved.

The native struggled to his knees.

"God Anubis!" he screamed. "I pray thee, strike thou this defiler of the sacred tomb. Thou movest in many ways, but all to the one end that he who defiles what is sacred feels the smart. Punish this one with death!"

He bowed twice, touching his forehead to the floor, and fixed his malignant eyes on Talcott, who stood, calm, opposing his body to the blast that swept through the house wildly.

The wind slackened and there was a grinding creak as the house settled together again. Then came another long running roar as a fresh blast swept in from the sea.

"God Anubis!" screamed the native. "Strike!"

There was a crash in the garden as a portion of the stone wall went down under the wind. The roof rose slowly, broke and whirled down into the room. A heavy beam struck Talcott squarely in the head, and he fell at the feet of the wild-eyed native, dead.

"God Anubis! I thank thee!"

A frenzied laugh mingled with the scream of the wind that swept through the shattered cottage.

The wind slackened to a deadly stillness. On the coast a surf poured thunderously, shaking the downs.

In the corner of the wrecked building there was a whir of wheels, a click, and the clock struck—four peals on the chimes for the quarters, and then twelve booming strokes.

ON THE NEWSSTANDS!

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By S. Fowler Wright

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THE SOUL TRAP

By Charles B. Stilson

He essayed to catch an immortal soul midway in its last escaping flight. . . . And success was his, in a way he had not thought of—and horror beyond all dreaming. . . .

SATISFIED from his first glance that the case was hopeless, the doctor laid his medicine-case on the table and seated himself beside the couch to wait for the end. It would not be long delayed.

He would have liked to have questioned the servant who had summoned him; but the man was a deaf-mute, and old and inane to boot. He pottered about the room for a few moments, his vacuous eyes staring owlishly from the physician to the dying man, and then withdrew to the rear of the house, rubbing his lean old hands together and shaking his head. There was no one else to keep the watch with Pennerton.

Near the foot of the couch a tall, old-fashioned clock ticked steadily. Beyond the open windows the poplars whispered endlessly to their neighbor pines: "When? When? When?" And from within the old clock answered them. "Not yet; not yet."

White lilacs, unnaturally pallid in the light of the moon, peered through the casements and nodded in the night breeze as they watched the master die. Except for these and death and the dying, Pennerton was alone.

The man died hard. Never in the course of a considerable professional experience had the doctor seen a vitality more persistent than that which was being forced slowly from its citadel before his eyes. By all the rules of the grim old game, death should have turned down the cards hours before.

Half of the long body lay very quiet; for it was paralyzed from the waist. In that part of its domain still left to it, life struggled furiously to remain. He was an old man, too. Wasted tissues, withered hands, the creases in the neck, the wrinkled brow, all gave the lie to the curling black hair and bush of beard that age had failed to blanch.

And strong; for the ceaselessly groping hands had torn the tough, hemmed linen of the sheets to fringe. Not for an instant did the long fingers cease their fretting. The thin shoulders twitched. The chest scarcely rose for a breath that was not a shudder. With eyes fast closed, the features of the face writhed continually; but always they registered one of two expressions—iron determination was succeeded by overmastering terror.

On Pennerton, watching, there grew the impression that there must be a strong and terrible reason for such unnatural, such fierce tenacity; that in this gaunt, half-dead body an intelligence was still keenly, fearfully alive; that, with its defenses nearly battered down, a quenchless spirit was holding death at bay until a great purpose should be accomplished.

So powerful was that impression that the physician found himself straining forward in his chair like one who has a hazard in a hard-fought game and seeks by stress of his own will and body to urge on to victory the player he has favored.

For a long hour the ancient clock ticked out its repeated message of procrastination. And then, as such old clocks sometimes do, it changed its tenor and its tone.

"Time's up! Time's up!" it seemed to say.

The man on the couch gasped. His head rolled from side to side on his pillow; he

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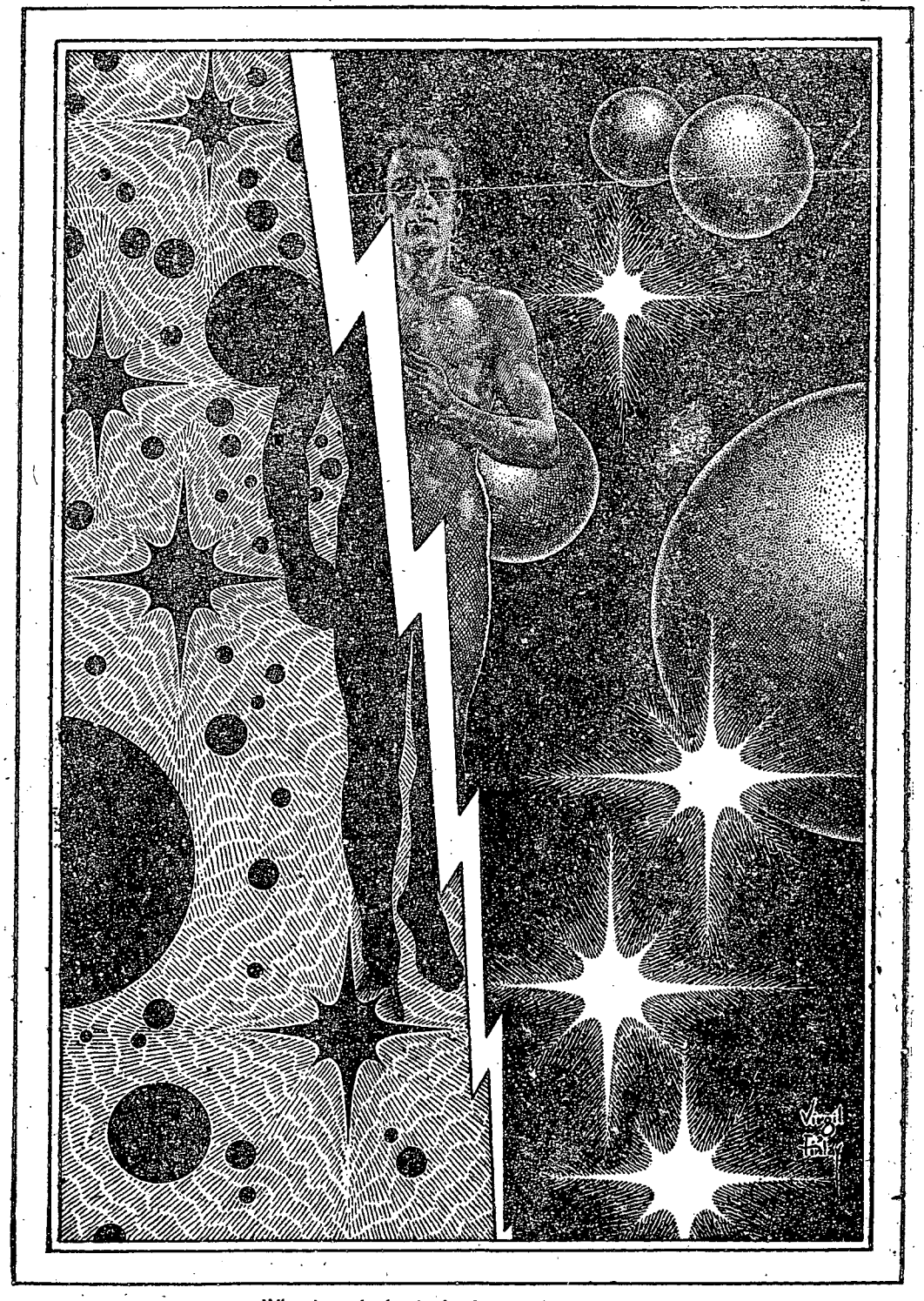

What is, and what is the destiny of, that part of man that still lives on when the body perishes?

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opened his eyes, saw Pennerton bending toward him, and by a surpeme effort raised himself on his elbow. His lips worked. Then his gaze strayed from the watcher's face to a closed door at the far side of the room; and over his features spread an expression of such frenzied and unutterable horror that the doctor shuddered and turned pale.

Raising his free hand as if to ward off a deadly stroke, the dying man opened his lips; and though the palsied vocal cords did not respond, the effect on Pennerton of that soundless shriek was more awful than a wail from hell.

Twice and thrice the quivering jaw fell and twitched back. The old man glared around at Pennerton. The warding arm stiffened and pointed to the closed door. Then words came.

"Break! Break! Break!" The voice died into inarticulate yammering, then burst forth again in full-throated speech.

"For the love of God—break the crystal case!"

The agony, the terror, the appeal in that cry will echo in Pennerton's memory for years.

Seeing the look of incomprehension on the doctor's face, the old man swung around, and his fist crashed down on a litter of papers which lay on a small table at the head of the couch.

"Read! Read! And—and—break—" He choked, collapsed on the pillow—and was gone.

PENNERTON eased the twisted body on the couch. He folded the bony hands on the gaunt chest and smoothed the disordered coverings. The dead man's eyes, wide open, seemed to follow his every movement. From their depths they still sent forth that agonized, compelling appeal that had been their last message when the hand of death had closed.

Pennerton found a couple of silver quarters in his pocket, and closing the staring eyes laid the coins on the lids. He had only to summon the old servant and take his departure. But he did not go. The physician found it hard to ignore the message of those eyes. Through the closed lids with their silver weights they still were staring, urging, commanding.

What was it that this man would have him do? What fear had left that dread impress that even death had not effaced? What was this crystal case that must be broken? What lay beyond that closed door?

The doctor stood by the couch and stared at the door. It was of oak, paneled, heavy, and substantial, as everything in this house was substantial. A key was set in the lock. Was it locked or unlocked? Pennerton wondered. Had the dead man turned that key to intervene between himself and some fearful transaction on the other side of the door? Or had he left the lock free, so that by a turn of the knob he might pass in and face whatever thing it was beyond that he had dreaded?

Pah! The man was crazed. Illness had unsettled his reason. His wild terror was a vagary born of disease and solitude. There was nothing beyond the closed door—nothing at any rate that a healthy-minded man should dread. Pennerton smiled at himself for having allowed his fancy to be so played upon. And yet—with a resolute set to his shoulders, the doctor crossed the room and gripped the white china knob of the door.

It turned in his grasp. The door was not locked. It yielded, opened. It gave on a steep and narrow stair, a dark staircase with a gleam of faint light above, as of moonbeams filtering through the branches of trees. A draft of cool air drew down the stairway and fanned Pennerton's cheeks; air so cool that it chilled his flesh—and it was nearly June. He shivered and closed the door. And quite unconsciously his fingers turned the key in the lock.

What was in that upper chamber, or attic—for the physician remembered now that the house in which he stood was one of those quaint, rambling, story-and-a-half structures of a type popular three-quarters of a century ago—could wait until morning for investigation. He would come again then and lay this foolish fantasy that had taken passing hold of his imagination.

He recrossed the room to the table to get his medicine case and his hat. What need to waken the old servant now? There was nothing to be done; let the man sleep. He stepped to the smaller table at the head of the couch to extinguish the light that burned there. His fingers were on the key of the lamp when his attention was arrested by the superscription of a large square envelope that lay on the table.

"To the physician whom the servant has gone to fetch—" it read.

So the dying man had known then that Pennerton was coming when he addressed this envelope.

A sheaf of papers, loosely folded, was thrust part way into the envelope in dis-

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array, as though the hand that had placed them there had faltered at its task. They were covered with fine chirography, its lines closely written for the most part, but sprawling painfully at intervals, and in some places illegible. The doctor glanced at the opening sentences, then settled himself in a chair and read without pause to the end:

You, who will read these lines, I do not know you. I, Theron Karker, who write, was born in this house; for nearly forty years, since I was schooled, I have carried on continual labors here; yet I do not know the name even of the village doctor. Truly, I have been in this hamlet, but not of it. I know not if you are homeopath or allopath. No matter; I am beyond all your skill at dosing. An hour, perhaps two, and I am done. So I must make haste, haste. For there is a task I must lay upon you—God grant that you be of strong heart to do it—and it must be done, *must* be. And another than myself must do it. I am stricken of a deadly numbness of my lower limbs and cannot leave this couch. I have tried to drag myself by my hands; but my strength has failed and I cannot.

Go into the upper chamber, above this room where I lie, and break the crystal case that you will find there. Ah, you cannot refuse to do this! If you would set free a soul from tortures more terrible than hell hath dreamed, shatter those crystal walls!

(Here a number of sentences of the manuscript were illegible).

. . . would have asked the servant; but he is old and foolish. He would not understand, and would flee the house in terror and leave me with my task undone, that must be done. So in my extremity I turn to you, a stranger. I have refused to allow a physician to be fetched before, thinking that I might mend, might at least gain strength to reach that chamber. But I cannot, and it is too great a task for the old man's feeble limbs to carry me thither.

Tonight I feel that I am dying; so he has gone to fetch you. It grows late. He may not find you readily; his wit is as decrepit as his body. Probably I shall not live—

(Another unreadable scrawl).

. . . if time is vouchsafed me before the final summons comes, explain to you this request that must seem both strange and meaningless.

From my earliest memory as a reasoning being, it seems to me, my mind had engrossed itself in speculation on the problem of the race, the great unanswered question of the ages: What is, and what the destiny of, that part of man that still lives on when the body perishes? When I returned hither from my college studies, the analysis of theories, the dissection of religions, the vivisection of creeds, had grown on me, was an obsession. I made it a life study. Around me here I have gathered them all—the religions and the philosophies of the centuries, the living creeds and the dead.

In my labors I have gone farther than most. Now, as the end of those labors is nearing, I wonder with the poet, "Is it true that the wisest wander farthest and most hopelessly are lost?" Is all the groping, struggling, the toiling of these forty years wasted and futile?

Of the creeds that I have examined, I would say that most are founded on truth; but in none of them, search as I would, could I find man's naked soul, his self, his ego. So I passed down the list of those stern, tender, terrible beliefs that humanity has nurtured so long and so faithfully, until I came at length to one which, if less ably garnished with theories than some of the others, did at least offer me more of the manisfestations of that which I sought.

TIME for me is too brief to tell you all of what I found among the Spiritualists. But they convinced me—not of the truth of all that they hold *is* true, but that there *is* a part of man that survives his mortal shell; and that—in a feeble, halting fashion—they could hold communication with it.

And there was the veil I could not pierce, but only dimly see through its mesh. I was balked and halted. For the "messages" the mediums brought me were such pitiful, meager, puerile fragments. Farther than this they could not aid me; that the soul passed beyond, like that newly come to this world, is weak and inexperienced in its state and must develop and progress, as a child's mind unfolds. And when the soul does gain in strength and expression, it straightway uses its new-found powers to pass on into another realm, whence no mediumistic summons may recall it.

Then, on an accursed day, I reasoned, if all these things be true, and a man find some way to cage a spirit and confine it, he might find it to progress and grow under his hand, in a hot-house as it were, and control it to his purpose.

Familiarity with the sciences of the

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laboratory led me to ponder this problem to a conclusion. Spirits, I argued, must have some material qualities; else how can they produce audible phenomena, how rap on walls, play musical instruments, move articles of furniture? If so, if the soul is capable of such manifestations—and I had experienced them often—it must be in the nature of an ethereal fluid or essence; and such may be confined.

A fluid, an essence, may pass through the air unseen, may penetrate wherever air may penetrate. But, of all the substances wherewith the chemists work, there is one through which only sound and light may pass—and they are vibrations and not fluids. That substance is glass. Air does not pass through glass. It may be used to enclose a vacuum. Even that mysterious and powerful fluid we call electricity meets in glass an impassable barrier.

Why should not glass contain a soul? I asked myself. . . . So the man, he was an Italian, came across the sea and helped me.

He was a clever artisan, skilled in all the devices of the glass-working craft. Under my direction, he constructed it, slowly and with care, a casket of solid glass, seven feet square, with never a seam or a break in its entire structure, save at its top an opening large—large enough to pass the body of a man.

I paid the craftsman, and he went away to Italy again. But his brazier was left behind and a supply of glass. And I had learned of him, while we worked together, enough to finish my task.

I became a human spider then, waiting for a human fly, that I might suck the soul of in my wondrous crystal web.

At last I found a victim. Do not misread me. I have done no offense against human laws. Would that I had, and that merely, and were to suffer only human justice for it.

He was a man I had known and near forgotten, James Irvin, a college-mate of years ago. Knowledge came to me that he had met evil days, was dying slowly of tuberculosis in a county hospital in another state, alone and unfriended. I was glad; for none must know my purpose with him. I must risk no prying interference.

I fetched Irvin here. I told them where he was that I would take him away, and for the sake of our old-time friendship would make his last days easy. There was no obstacle. They were glad, I think, to escape the care of him. And Irvin, God forgive me, he was extremely grateful.

With what impatience, then, I waited for Irvin to die! The more so when I discovered in myself the symptoms of the incurable malady that has laid me low. Every hour that he lived was withholding from me the fruits of my life's labor. How I grudged him those last poor hours! And how I watched him, that he might not slip away and leave me only his useless corpse! But, terrible as my impatience was, I did nothing to hasten on his end. Of that at least I stand guiltless.

Well, he died at last one night; but he did not escape me.

He had grown very weak. Life hung by a thread so slender that I dared not quit his bedside for more than moments, day or night; or sleep, lest it should snap and balk me.

All my preparations had been made. In the great glass case above I had taken, piece by piece, and set up, a low pallet and a small writing table. On the table I laid two hundred sheets of white paper and two dozen pencils, carefully pointed. I nailed small cleats around the table edges, so that the pencils should not roll from it and break on the crystal floor. I suspended a block and tackle from a rafter above the casket. In the last few days I kept my brazier fired day and night, that my glass might be in readiness for instant use.

The time came. Irvin lay in the room back in the library here, so nearly gone that I dared to wait no longer. His death was a matter of minutes only. And I? I was elated, gripped by an exaltation that recked not of lack of sleep and days in which I scarcely had tasted food. I was strong and confident. Only my feet were numb, with a growing numbness that presaged the advance of the malady that had seized me.

I ascended to the upper chamber and lighted the lamp that stood on a table beside the casket. The brazier was burning. The molten glass was ready. I stood and gazed at that shimmering crystal mausoleum as the lamplight gleamed through its transparent walls, and it was more fair to me in its seeming than any scintillant palace that fancy ever constructed; and fit for its purpose, too, it seemed—to be the abode of an immortal soul. Then the whole structure trembled, wavered. I felt myself falling. I threw out my hands, and I felt the cold and polished wall of glass as my palms slid down its surface, where my fingers could clutch no hold. My senses left me.

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How long I lay unconscious I do not know; but I awoke at last, awoke with a horrible fear of defeat. While I had swooned weakly, had Irvin died and left my toiling of the years with miserable failure as its end? I hastened down the stair. No, I was not too late. His condition was unchanged. But there was not a moment to be wasted.

I looked down at the dying man, an unlovely thing of bones and skin and hard-fetched breath, so weak now that even his racking cough was stilled. A strange wave of nausea swept over me. I fought it fiercely, but succumbed, and once more I fell unconscious. That swoon was of brief duration. I arose from it, shook it off, and addressed myself to the completion of my task.

Again my brain was clear and confident, and I was strong. I plucked Irvin from his pillow—his weight was little more than that of a child—and carried him on my shoulders to the chamber above. I laid him in the canvas sling that I had made ready, and with my block and tackle I raised him to the dome of the crystal case and lowered him within it. I entered after him and laid him on the cot.

The disturbance and the motion had set his heart to beating faster. He opened his eyes—the first time in many hours—and looked at me. I thought I read a question and a growing terror in his eyes. Then his jaw fell and his throat began to rattle. In mad haste I clambered from the casket. I fetched glass and blowpipe, and, working on the little scaffold at the dome, I drew the molten crystal up to a point, twisted it, and cut it with my pliers. The work was done. The crystal cell was sealed.

Within five minutes the lifeless corpse of James Irvin lay on the cot in the great crypt of glass. And his spirit?—time would tell.

I must have stumbled from the chamber to my couch; for there I awoke after many hours of slumber.

Then began days of unceasing vigil. My will has never been feeble. I fought off the demands of nature. I scarcely slept. I might have starved but for my old servant, Marc Terriss.

He had long before been forbidden access to the upper chamber. I kept the door locked always. But many a time his insistent rapping at the stair-door roused me from my watch to partake of the food that I had forgotten. One thing my will could not conquer; that was the slow, insidious advance of the malady that your experience will have taught you can neither be retarded nor hastened. With my hands almost gripping the infinite to impart its secrets to the world of men, the infinite itself reached out to me to take me away.

DAYS passed, and only death's ally, decay, seemed busy in the crystal case. The meager features of James Irvin became swollen and discolored. His clawlike hands festered. But his spirit stirred not.

Was it gone? Had it passed, thinner than a shadow's shadow, through the glass walls of the trap that I had set for it? Had it escaped me? Those were days of doubt; but I remembered what the mediums had told me and was steadfast. By day I watched with the sunlight that streamed through those walls of crystal. By night I kept vigil with three powerful lamps that I had provided.

And then one day at noontide I strained forward with eyes staring and my face pressed flat against the crystal wall. Something stirred within the casket! It was only a sheet of paper, one of those paper sheets that lay on the writing table. But it moved! Aye, gently as though an infant's breath had disturbed it, it half rolled up, turned over, and fluttered to the floor. In my ears the blood pounded, roaring like the surging sea. And in my heart was a mighty triumph.

For in that sealed crypt no thing of earth could stir!

That was all. For many hours, perhaps days, no other motion disturbed the awful serenity of that crystal chamber.

It was a pencil next that Irvin's spirit essayed to move, *did* move. It was in the dead of night; but I was watching, waiting. I saw it. The end pencil of the row detached itself from its fellows and rolled to the table's edge, against the cleat that I had nailed there. It struggled there, rolling back and forth, upending an inch or two and falling back; and finally, balancing on the cleat, it oscillated, tipped, and fell and lay on the glass floor with broken point!

I was struck with consternation. Here was a contingency against which I was not provided. Should Irvin's blundering spirit break the points of all my pencils, how could it communicate with me?

With a devilish persistence, it seemed to me, that spirit labored to undo my work. While I looked on in torture, one by one, it let fall and broke four more pencils,

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returning from each catastrophe to effect another.

Then it appeared to tire, and desisted. For another period of long hours there was no sign within the casket to tell me that it was haunted by a prisoned soul.

Ah, the mediums were right! It gained strength. When next it moved a pencil, it lifted it. Despite myself, I shuddered and the hair at my neck rose when the bit of wood and graphite stood erect on its point and staggered dizzily across the topmost sheet of paper, leaving an irregular, meaningless line behind it.

Many sheets of paper it covered with those futile lines before it learned to control a pencil and to write—for it *did* write. Always it threw its failures to the floor, to essay anew on a fresh page.

From mere lines to illegible scrawling and then to unconnected, rambling sentences the spirit progressed. Its first coherent message, and those that followed, were appeals to me for its release. Pleading, bitterness, defiance, menace; it ran the gamut of them all. It upbraided me for withholding it from its path to paradise. It pleaded eloquently with me to break its prison and set it free to go on its appointed way. It pictured to me the horror of its confinement, mewed up with the body that it could no longer tenant—the body that it had loved—now decaying into loathsome putrescence. But I was obdurate and ruthless.

Through the glass that intervened between us it read my object, divined my every thought. It taunted me and tantalized me with hints at greater knowledge that it possessed, but would not—

(Here another passage of Karker's narrative was illegible).

. . . I grow weaker. This chronicle must end soon. Elsewhere, in my diary, I have set down fully the messages that I received from the spirit of James Irvin: They may be confirmed from the originals; they are all there, in the crystal case. Would to God that I had yielded!

Yesterday came the last. It was—

(A number of sentences blotted out).

. . . God! I have tried to write it, but I cannot. It was of such appalling horror, a threat of a doom so hideous, that even I recoiled in terror. I fled that chamber as from a pestilence. I fell upon my couch here. When sense returned, I found that my limbs were paralyzed. I could not move them.

Had I all the treasures of Golconda I would barter them gladly for the strength to ascend once more to that chamber, to enter, to break that crystal cell and set free that poor, tortured soul. You *must* do this! *For God's sake, break that case and set Irvin's spirit free!*

And I, though I shall lie here seemingly dead, insensate clay, I shall know! Yes; for that is a part of punishment—to know—part of the penalty that is so awful that I cannot, will not, write it to haunt fellow mortals through all their days.

Ah, you will believe me and do this thing! Go up into that chamber. It is all there. The crystal is there. The records are there. Read them—and believe.

I have dared to tamper with the great laws of being, and I shall suffer—God, the suffering! My body is perishing; but my mind works on, as clearly now as ever it did in my life—*he* said it would!

My pen grows heavy, too heavy....

KARKER'S writing, which had grown more tremulous and uneven toward its close, ended in a wavering line. On the carpet at Pennerton's feet lay the dead man's pen. Having read the burden of the dread record it had written, the doctor did not wonder that it had fallen from those weary, faltering fingers. He felt his own hands trembling as he laid the pages by.

Once more he heard the rhythmic ticking of the tall old clock as its tireless pendulum swung to and fro. He heard the whisperings of the trees, the fretting of leafy boughs against the clapboards of the house.

God! Could this thing be true?

Pennerton, a man strong of sense and with imagination well-disciplined, swung around in his chair and faced that closed door and felt the swimming horror of the dead man's revelation overmastering him. What monstrous thing dwelt in that silent room above him?

"My God! I dare not enter that chamber—not now!" he breathed.

The sound of his own whisper roused him. He brushed a hand across his forehead. The perspiration there was chill as tombstone damp. He left his seat and began pacing Theron Karker's library floor.

When he passed the closed door, he shuddered. Banished for this night were all thoughts of home and slumber. It were easier for him to quit this house were he fettered in chains of brass than to disregard that wild appeal that Karker had sent to him across the gap of death. But he could not do the dead man's bidding

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now—not yet. He must wait for the light of day to cross the threshold and face the tenant of that chamber.

On the shelved walls of the library around him in their quiet rows stood the annals of the world's religions, the sum of human philosophies. Here were cold Kant and ponderous Schopenhauer and the visions of Swedenborg; here, Hegel and Darwin; and there, Drummond and the warmer imageries of Blavatsky, Besant and the Hindu mystics. There, too, were the printed bulwarks of the captains of Christ and Mohammed, Buddha and Confucius, and a legion of the lesser ones, the names of whom were unknown to Pennerton.

Many of them were in languages that were beyond the knowledge of the doctor and the contents of which he could only guess. This was the soul-laboratory of Theron Karker, where he had sought what he called truth in that eager, bitter search of forty years, where he had striven to analyze and classify the immortal part of mortal man.

The light burned dim in the big student's lamp at the head of the couch. Pennerton shook it to renewed life for a while; but at length it failed him utterly and went out. Then, strong man though he was, because he could not bear the flickering shadows that the moonlight played across the still face of a dead man, he quitted the library and went out on the front porch to wait with his pipe for the coming of the dawn.

As the last blue mists of the night were fading from yard and hill and landscape, Pennerton arose and went within.

In the hours he had passed on the porch the strong nature of the man had reasserted itself; his poise had returned. The thing that he had read was preposterous. It was not; it could not be. Either Theron Karker was a madman, crazed by his morbid researches and unreined fancies, or he had played a ghastly joke when he had set his pen to that gruesome chronicle of his.

So Pennerton turned back the key in the door that he had locked and climbed the steep stairway. As he ascended the stairs he was fully convinced that he should find not a trace above of the unholy tragedy that he believed had existed only in the demented brain of the sick man.

It still was dusk in the attic chamber. The sun had not yet risen high enough to send its rays through the windows and the skylight of the cupola that topped the house and dispel the shadows of the room. A big room it was, wide and high, extending well over half the house.

Pennerton stood hesitant at the head of the stairs and strained his eyes to pierce the gloom of that dim twilight of the morning. To one side of him was a piled litter of ancient furniture, and near it a big closed cabinet of dark wood with a work-bench in front of it.

The physician peered on past the wooden cabinet. Then he saw—*It,* and a chill hand seemed to grip his heart and hold it motionless.

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Its outlines gleaming, glittering, through the dim light that was full of shadows, a great case of crystal stood just below the windowed cupola! Within the walls of glass, half concealed and half defined, Pennerton could see the outlines of a small table, and nearer the floor, a long, low cot, covered over with white.

Theron Karker's words were true!

For a second time since he had set foot in this house Pennerton's hard and ingrained sensibility deserted him. He did not stay to see more, but stumbled down the narrow stair in such haste that he was near to falling headlong.

It was there! And the doctor's skepticism was shattered to its foundations. The crystal case was there! What more besides, he dared not to conjecture. Of one thing was he certain; he would not go back into that chamber until the fullest light of day shone in it; and then he *would* go back.

Hideous as might be the revelation that awaited him there, he would face it and have done with it. He returned to his porch and pipe to wait for the height of the sun.

FOR another hour the doctor waited. When the old lawn was bathed in sunlight and the sleepy twitterings of the birds had changed into their glad morning-song, he left the porch, ascended the attic stair and stood before the crystal chamber.

Work of a master craftsman indeed was here. Seven feet high and long and broad it stood, and domed at its top. Broad rays of the sun shone on its splendid structure through the windows and the skylights of the cupola. Playing through its shimmering sides, the beams cast their prismatic color patterns along the floor and walls of the attic room, like reflections from the facets of a monstrous gem.

A marvel; but within it a greater marvel was revealed to Pennerton's reluctant eyes.

On a small table in the center of the crypt, a table cleated around its edges, lay two hundred sheets of immaculate white paper, unmarked and undisturbed. Beside the pages in an orderly row lay two dozen lead pencils, carefully pointed; and on the floor beside the table—*an empty cot!*

That was all. There was no other thing within the chamber.

Above it swung a block and tackle, attached to the rafters. Nearby stood a large brazier, its fires long dead. An earthen crucible on the brazier was nearly filled with glass that once had been molten, but now was hard and cold. On a rack at the brazier's side hung a blowpipe and other tools of the glass-worker's art. Three wooden stands stood about the sides of the crystal case, and on each was a large brass lamp.

All was as Theron Karker had described it; but—

His brain in a maze, his body sick with the revulsion of feeling, Pennerton turned from those things and went down the stairs. In the library he met Marc Terriss. The servant was bending over his dead master. As he straightened up, Pennerton thought his rheumy old eyes were moist. But Terriss could not voice his grief.

Seizing his prescription pad, the doctor wrote:

"Has a man named James Irvin been in this house?"

Old Marc took the paper from him and stared at it vacantly. Then a gleam of intelligence came into his eyes. He took a pencil from his pocket and scrawled:

"Yes."

"Where is he now?" wrote Pennerton, and waited breathless while the old man's tremulous fingers traced the answer.

"Dead."

"What became of his body?" persisted Pennerton.

"Buried in the churchyard. Mr. Karker brought him here. He was dying. He died one night about three weeks ago. I found him dead in his bed. Mr. Karker had been with him and had fainted on the floor beside the bed. Mr. Karker was ill too. I got him to bed. His mind was not right after that night. He used to rave at times. I never told him that Irvin had died. I did not want to worry him with that. I got the coroner, and they buried Irvin in the churchyard."

"When was Karker last able to be about—on his feet?" queried the doctor.

"He never walked again after I found him on the floor that night. He was paralyzed."

Pennerton made no more queries, but stood lost in thought. Old Marc hesitated for a moment and then shuffled away. When he had gone, Pennerton stepped to the side of the couch. He looked down at the dead man and his face grew solemn with pity. Slowly he said:

"Ah, the poor tortured spirit was not there, not in the crystal chamber, my friend. It was here"; and he laid his hand on Theron Karker's cold forehead.

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FANTASY BOOK REVIEWS

By Sam Moskowitz

All books intended for review purposes should be addressed by their publishers to, Fantasy Book Review, Fantastic Novels, 205 East 42nd St., New York 17, N. Y.

FANTASY CRAFTSMAN

WITHOUT SORCERY by Theodore Sturgeon. The Prime Press, (P. O. Box 2019), Philadelphia, Pa. 355 pages. $3.00.

Approximately ten years after his first appearance in the fantasy magazine field, Prime Press has collected a volume of thirteen of Theodore Sturgeon's novelettes and short stories and presented evidence of his capability of authorship in a single compact package, to be judged by the general public.

The most striking fact about Theodore Sturgeon's work is his incredible versatility in adjusting himself to almost any theme he contemplates. Unlike Ray Bradbury, who has written the introduction to this volume and who is one of the brightest literary stars on the fantasy horizon, Sturgeon does not present even a hint of the repetition in theme, style and ideas, which duplication presents Bradbury's chief weakness. Because of this, there is no need to urge moderation in the sampling of Sturgeon's wares. With the lone exception of **Butyl and the Breather,** which is a sequel to **The Ether Breather,** it would be hard to believe that any two stories in the volume came from the pen of one author.

There is not a story in the book which can honestly be called poor and such stories as **It** in the field of fantasy and **Microcosmic Gods** in the field of science fiction are already accepted and previously anthologized classics in their respective niches.

From the stories in this volume one gains the impression of a would-be artist, constantly experimenting with his medium in the hope of great improvement. This impression adds a note of integrity to Sturgeon's work.

MYLES CABOT ON VENUS

THE RADIO MAN by Ralph Milne Farley. The Fantasy Publishing Company, Inc., (8318 Avalon Blvd.), Los Angeles, Calif. 177 pages. $2.50.

Ralph Milne Farley belongs to the old school of scientifictionists who followed the pattern of Edgar Rice Burroughs and which included such notables as Otis Adelbert Kline, Ray Cummings, Garrett Smith, George Allan England and others. As such his aim is entertainment first and the preaching of a moral secondary if at all. In the **Radio Man** he accomplishes his objective, composing a fast-moving interplanetary story of the planet Venus, replete with advanced inventions, alien creatures, strange civilizations and the love interest, which elements comprise the basic success formula of the old-school science fiction writer.

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If you fancy yourself as an ultra-sophisticate who must find social significance in the web of the stories and cannot tolerate lines that are not clipped in the Hemingway fashion, this tale of Myles Cabot, who is transported to the planet Venus without preparation or travail; who battles against and then with the giant ants of Venus to attain the hand of Lilla, fair princess of that planet, will prove utterly insufferable to you. But those who retain enough of their youth to remember the magic of roaming the ancient plains of Mars with Edgar Rice Burroughs' famous character, John Carter, will also relish this story.

Old-time readers of **Argosy** and early issue followers of **F.F.M.** will be pleased to see this famous old-time scientific romance gain the sanctity of hard covers at last.

HUMOR IN SCIENCE FICTION

THE WHEELS OF IF by L. Sprague de Camp. Shasta Publishers, (5525 Blackstone), Chicago, Ill. 222 pages. $3.00.

To L. Sprague de Camp, the field of science fiction owes some measure of thanks for successfully incorporating that rare element "humor" into the genre. Withal a dry humor but nevertheless humor, and if there is any one ingredient the serious visage of science fiction sorely needs it is that elusive touch of good-natured lightness.

In grappling to combine a few smiles with the weighty scientific stuff it is not surprising that de Camp sometimes fails, but it is quite amazing that he succeeds at all, leastways so frequently. Even tales ostensibly told as straightforward narrative, such as **The Gnarly Man,** have a lilt and lightness to the dialogue that stresses the less serious aspects of the story. **Hyperpilosity** which we believe was de Camp's second published science fiction story stands up remarkably well and the intriguing ramifications of this tale where all mankind suddenly begins to grow a coat of fur becomes in the hands of Mr. de Camp first-rate entertainment.

We are not as fond of the title story of the volume **Wheels of If** as we are of the shorts, but even here there is a deftness of style which may redeem it in the eyes of the average reader. We believe that this volume points up the fact that another, more comprehensive collection of de Camp's shorter works, would be a desirable thing.

WARM-BLOODED SEA SERPENT

THE LUNGFISH, THE DODO AND THE UNICORN by Willy Ley. Viking Press (18 E. 48th St.), N. Y. 361 pages. $3.75.

Among science fiction readers Willy Ley is known as an authority on rockets, an enthusiastic, collecting science fiction fan from way back and probably the best and certainly the most successful writer of factual material for the science fiction magazines the field has ever produced. Knowing the extent of his scholarship through the numerous and diverse articles he has done, it is only a little surprising to this reviewer to learn that Willy Ley started out as a student of zoology and paleontology, and that he was really conscientious in his early studies is borne out by the rerelease of this non-fiction book in which he explores legends of extinct creatures and verifies the existence of rare ones.

There are long chapters devoted in Ley's unique fashion of combining scholarship with popular writing to the frequent stories of the appearance of sea serpents. These stories are scientifically broken down and it is proven that the sea serpent if it exists is probably not a serpent at all but a mammal, since only a warm-blooded mammal could live in the icy waters where the sea serpents have purportedly been seen. Willy Ley leans to the conclusion that some day a sea animal, hitherto unknown and larger than any whale, may be discovered.

The legend of the Unicorn is pretty definitely found to have basis in misleading descriptions of the African rhinoceros.

Some of the fantastic beasts we believe only exist in legend are actually alive today and Willy Ley's accounts of their habits and habitats leaves little to be desired.

DROLL DREAMER

THE FOURTH BOOK OF JORKENS by Lord Dunsany. Arkham House, Sauk City, Wisconsin. 194 pages. $3.00.

Readers of **Famous Fantastic Mysteries** who reveled in Dunsany's unusual shorts

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The Postman of Otford and **The Highwayman** printed in that magazine will be thrilled to learn that a brand new collection of Lord Dunsany's short stories is now available from Arkham House.

It is only fair to warn that these stories are not the dreamy, biblical-phrased, far-off fantasies of Dunsany's youth, such as cemented his reknown in **A Dreamer's Tales** and **Tales of Three Hemispheres.** The stories in **The Fourth Book of Jorkens** are written by an older Dunsany who has ceased to dream, but whose imagination is keener and pen more adroit than ever before.

All the tales are dispensed by Jorkens at the Billiard Club in England. In the telling of these tales Jorkens has at times been accused of mendaciousness but never of lack of fancy. He relates his "tall" ones in a delightfully droll British style. In their own category the Jorkens tales are as artistic as Dunsany's earlier work and many critics are of the opinion that they are far superior in entertainment value.

There are science fiction tales here, in addition to fantasies, weirds and some off-trail, unclassifiable yarns. Come to this book with an open mind, discarding any past judgments of Dunsany and consider these stories as if you had never heard of the author. It is largely up to the make-up of the individual of course, but I believe most of you will enjoy this book.

TOP-RANK ENTERTAINER

A MARTIAN ODYSSEY AND OTHERS by Stanley G. Weinbaum. Fantasy Press, (P. O. Box 159), Reading, Pa. 289 pages. $3.00.

Fantasy Press, unquestionably one of the leaders in the publication of book fantasy, who at this writing have published some sixteen volumes of science fiction and fantasy, have produced in **A Martian Odyssey** their most outstanding volume.

Experimenting with a collection instead of their customary novel, they have brought back into print, in an eminently handsome and readable format the tales which are Stanley G. Weinbaum's finest.

If you have heard of Weinbaum but have read little of him, purchase this volume. He has written nothing better. Present are **A Martian Odyssey** and its sequel **Valley of Dreams,** the two tales which established Weinbaum's reputation. **The Adaptive Ultimate,** originally published under the **nom de plume** of John Jessel and twice produced in half-hour shows over nation-wide radio hook-ups, certainly deserves a place, as do those other tales in the light, breezy, enjoyable pattern of **A Martian Odyssey.** The type of stories which were the cornerstone of his popularity such as **The Mad Moon, Parasite Planet, The Planet of Doubt** and what probably ranks as his finest. **The Lotus Eaters,** are also here.

In rereading and recapitulation (and the fact that he can be reread is compliment enough), I find that the author deserved the plaudits that were heaped upon him. He was an extremely skillful literary entertainer of the top-rank and the fact that **Time Magazine** used this book as an excuse for a full page write-up on science fiction would appear to be no mere coincidence.

Unreservedly recommended.

ORIENTAL MAGIC

THE PORCELAIN MAGICIAN by Frank Owen. The Gnome Press (421 Claremont Parkway), N. Y., N. Y. 256 pages. $3.00.

In the realm of fantasy there are great names whose very mention brings up a certain group in the broad field; names such as A. Merritt, H. P. Lovecraft, Lord Dunsany, Clark Ashton Smith and John Collier. To those names add that of Frank Owen who in his own specialty of Chinese fantasies weaves his web as potently if less ostentatiously as those I have mentioned above.

To the fantasy collector the thin volumes, **The Wind That Tramps the World** and **The Purple Sea** have long been sought-after collector's items. Now, Gnome Press culls the best from those two volumes as well as from other sources and comes up with a volume of tales that needs no apology.

Among the stories contained in this book it would be almost impossible to pick a personal favorite, since the same painstaking atmospheric care is given to them all.

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LOST— ONE MYLODON

By

Elmer Brown Mason

Who ever found one? Pete Wells and the Russian did, and they'd like to have it back. It's a two-ton leftover of one of Mother Nature's earliest mistakes, loose somewhere in the Patagonian wilderness — but here's the story. . . .

THE fact of the matter is that, for a man who makes a profession of exploring expeditions, Pete Wells (which is me) had been in civilization too long. I was ripe to go any place where there were no waiters to be tipped. Certainly Bones' physical charms didn't lure me from my happy table in Old Swartz's Café, Jacksonville, Florida, U. S. A. The top of his head looked like an ostrich's egg, his face was a jungle of straw-colored beard, stiff as the spines of a hedgehog, out of which peeped two innocent blue eyes, and the rest of him was completely globular. In height he was six feet, all but nine inches, and his name was Nicholas Vladmir Versch-and-all-the-rest-of-the-alphabet-well scrambled.

But, law me, how that miracle of rotundity could talk! That evening, from the time I laid down his letter of introduction until next morning, I simply listened spellbound.

His specialty was bones, the bones of extinct animals, and he wanted me to go with him to a place called Ultima Speranza in southern Patagonia, where there was a famous cave full of bones, and then up along the Chilean Andes prospecting after the remains of beasts that had been dead so long that no one really knew how they had looked.

The proposition in itself did not appeal to me—I had tried it once before in a salt marsh on the Brazilian coast, and the 'skeeters had nearly eaten me alive—not until after the second drink, anyway, when he really began to talk. Then I started in seeing things. From a bunch of drawings of prehistoric and modern bones, he sorted the same kinds together and explained how he correlated them. First, he compared the thigh of a common or garden guinea pig to a busted up, second-hand-looking relic of what he called a toxodon, and, before I realized it, so vividly reconstructed a nine-foot rodent, with tremendous, chisel-like teeth, that I reached under my armpit to see if my automatic was loose in its scabbard.

Then came pterodactyls, flying reptiles with long, beak-like jaws and an eighteen-foot spread of leathery wings; a cute little atlantosaurus with a thigh bone larger than an elephant's; eighty-foot-long diplodocuses. . . . Honest, I was glad when the morning light filtered in, and only half of my quart of Scotch was gone, too, though the Russian had gotten away with two full bottles of white, blockade liquor—so like his native vodka, he apologized.

Of course I agreed to go with him, just couldn't help myself, and in less than a week we were on board a steamer for Valdiva, Chile.

It was a long trip, and I had plenty of time to size up my companion, and that fat little Russian seemed so simple that I just couldn't believe in him. Apparently his one object in life was the collecting of bones, and his present direct purpose to controvert some German scientist against

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"I whistled so the beast would turn its idiotic face toward us."

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whom he nursed a royal grouch because of the assertion that mylodons had sat on their haunches while pulling down the tops of trees to feed on instead of standing up like human beings.

I don't mean by all this that Bones was a freak and didn't know anything else. Quite the contrary. I don't think there was anything he didn't know something about, only nothing but prehistoric animals really interested him. He sang in the ship's concerts like a tuneful mockingbird, if you can imagine a bewhiskered mockingbird in a dinner coat that would have fitted a hogshead, never laid down two pair to a one-card draw, and took the masculine normal, or perhaps twice the normal, amount of alcohol.

He hadn't any use for the señoritas, though. A flock of them fluttered around him, but he let 'em flutter. I suppose they were attracted to him because he was so darned ugly. Women are often taken that way—no better proof than that I have had two romances in my own life, both ending happily.

VALDIVA is some little city. We put up at a hotel that even a commercial traveler couldn't have criticised. Bones slid out to look for the consul and a lot of people to whom he had letters, while I spread myself all over the waterfront trying to pick up a craft for the rest of our journey down the coast.

Gosh, but that was a punk lot of shipping! There was enough paint spread over rotten wood and rust-honeycombed iron to decorate several battleships, but not one thing I'd care to trust myself in off a lee shore. Had to give it up finally, it was getting so dark. Besides, a kind of a crowd had collected after I handed one to a skipper who demanded a hundred pesos from me for jabbing a knife into his schooner below the water-line—claimed I'd ruined it, which was probably true.

Back at the hotel, I found Bones down in the lobby, surrounded by a group of what it took no finesse to identify as reporters. They were asking him the usual fool questions: how he liked the country, how it compared with Russia, and so on, and they were calling him Count. He introduced me to the bunch, but, being only a plain American, I didn't make any big hit with them, so I bought a drink just to show how much I cared, and went up in the elevator.

"Can't stay in this town long, Pete," the Russian announced as he came into our apartments, "or we'll be done to death socially. I was simply forced to accept a dinner invitation for us."

"All right, Count," I agreed amiably; "I'll go downstairs and rob a waiter of his glad rags. Never be it said I deserted the aristocracy in their need."

It went at that. Somehow, he never was much stuck on my horsing; didn't seem to get it.

Annexing clothes proved no trouble, and when I came back the little man had hung medals all over himself.

"Gosh!" I cried in admiration. "You certainly look the part! Sure you are only a count, not one of those grand dukes?"

He answered rather shortly that his family had always been respectable, which kind of had me guessing exactly how he meant it, and then we were whisked away in a large touring car to a club.

It was a men's dinner. If I had known that in advance, I should have worn my own clothes—and felt like a fool in them, too, since everyone else wore evening dress, mostly with some decoration. The food was fine, the drink better, and Bones was sure the whole cheese. One old chap, with more medals than a baking-powder advertisement, made a long speech about how honored they were at having the great scientist, Count Vladmir, in their midst, and the count got up and said in a few well-chosen words he was darned glad to be there. Then we ate some more and drank a lot more, while the orchestra played "There'll Be a Hot Time in the Old Town To-night," which seemed to have just struck that burg and struck it hard.

To be perfectly truthful, I didn't have a roaring good time. The man on my left did nothing but eat. The man on my right would only converse in English, and all he knew was "You tak' li'l drink wis me?" which I did, until he couldn't talk at all. The feast finally ended, however, and we motored back to the hotel, only hitting one lamp-post on the way.

The next morning I was off to the wharves again, and with no better result. Finally, though I hadn't the slightest hope of securing it, just on a chance, I had myself rowed out to a dandy little steam yacht in the offing. Who should come to the rail but my right-hand neighbor of the night before with his "You tak' li'l drink?" I did, and then, since he consented to talk Spanish, I explained my predicament to him.

Easiest thing in the world! His yacht was quite at our service. It really would

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be a favor to him to use it, since he was forced to visit his *hacienda* in the interior for several months. He was tickled to death to be able to serve Count Vladmir. The crew was on board, the yacht provisioned.

He really meant it, too, and, congratulating myself on a piece of pure luck, we had another "li'l drink," and I beat it back to the hotel.

It was a long steam down the roughest coast I have ever seen until we swung it back of Desolation Island, and we simply never should have arrived at Ultima Speranza fiord had it not been for the luck of finding that perfectly appointed yacht with its pilots who knew the channels. As it was, within those land-locked waters we had to nose cautiously further and further inland, to the anxiety of a nervous captain and with a crew harassed by endless soundings and perpetual lookouts until, somewhat below 50°, Bones was contented to go ashore. The yacht was dismissed with orders to return in two months, and, hiring two sturdy white men from the little settlement to pack our supplies, we began forthwith our hunt for the cave.

It was an extraordinary country and, from my point of view, not a pleasant one. For a long way back from the sea, the land was arctic, bare and very rough; then came forests of enormous trees, above which rose the mountains, with silvery glaciers twisting from their sides like ribbons of burnished steel. We froze at night and boiled during the day, while the humidity was so great that mists were always rising from hidden valleys or streams, like the smoke of volcanoes.

Somehow, it all depressed me—gave me a feeling as though there was no going forward, no looking back—as though there was an inertia in all things.

I lost that feeling after we found the cave, though.

It isn't quite correct for me to say we found the cave. What we really did was to stumble on a little farm where dwelt an old, old white man, who directed us where to look. He claimed that within his time an immense piece of skin covered with greenish hair unlike that of any known animal, had been brought from there and, together with several barrels of bones, sold to men who came in ships. Then there had been some trouble with a wandering tribe of the big Patagonian Indians, and the cave had been gradually forgotten.

IT WAS a terrifically hot and muggy day when we reached the place. From the outside, it did not look like much; merely a symmetrical black half moon set in the green of the hillside. Inside, however, it opened up into a hundred-foot chamber, with walls fully thirty feet high, and the dry, sandy floor showed signs of having been disturbed in the center. It appealed to me principally as a place to get out of the sun, but the count went straight up in the air as soon as he was within.

Exactly as it had been described by Dr. Nordenskjöld! Humid atmosphere, but not too humid to reduce everything to peat. Cave dry—might find anything there!

He grabbed one of the two pointed shovels which, with a couple of mattocks, were our only collecting impedimenta, and dashed it into the undisturbed sand close to the wall. And promptly he did find something, the skeleton of a man about seven feet tall.

I didn't like it. It's all very well to dig up prehistoric animals, but I don't approve of meddling with graveyards, and a graveyard it proved to be. All along the edge of the cave, hardly two feet beneath the sand, were the skeletons of men and women, not one measuring less than six feet.

"Look here, Bones," I said. "Cover up those giants and let's get out of here. I absolutely refuse to dig up dead men, even in the interest of science."

"I don't understand," he answered, more to himself than to me. "Skeletons of comparatively modern savages, Patagonians according to the cranium. They have no business here. We'll try the middle of the cave, Pete."

I shoveled back the sand along the edges while he dug in the center, cussing quite fluently the while. It became evident that all the middle of the cave had been worked over, and his labors were rewarded only by the rib of a guanaco and a pointed sliver he claimed had been fashioned into an eating utensil from a dog's leg bone. Disgusted, we sat down, and realized for the first time that both our white bearers had disappeared, leaving their packs behind them.

After hallooing outside for a time, we saw night was falling and went back into the cave to escape the heavy dew. There was no wood for a fire, and as we sat in the darkness munching hard tack, I for one heartily wished myself back at Old Swartz's.

"It's been cleaned out," finally sighed

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my companion. "Our only hope is that, farther in, it may be untouched. Are you afraid to explore the entire cave to-night, Pete?"

Darned if I wouldn't have refused if he had put it in any other way. The skeletons were on my nerves, but I didn't propose to be bluffed by any foreigner, not if he had so many medals he had to wear them on the tails of his coat.

"After you, my dear Count," I answered, fishing our electric torches out of the packs, together with a half-dozen balls of twine.

Beyond the faint moonlight from the mouth of the cave it was black dark—not the darkness of out of doors when there are neither moon nor stars, but the enclosed blackness of the inside of a camera before the cap is taken off. I tied one end of a ball of twine tightly to a shovel driven in the sand, and followed the rotund form of my companion.

Around the walls we went, and then, bending our heads, dived under a shallow arch, walking on living rock. One ball, two balls, three balls of twine unwound as we explored a narrow passage which opened up finally into a small chamber with sandy floor.

"Here's something!" exclaimed the Russian, dragging a bone from the soil. "Another guanaco," he finished disgustedly, and went on. To the left the darkness became opaque, and there was the sound of slowly dripping water. A broad passage opened before us, and suddenly above our heads, through an aperture high, high in the rock, appeared a luminous body, the moon. We swept the place with our torches and nearly at our feet a tiny spring seeped up through the sand, flowing down an incline of white, luminous slime into the darkness. Bones took one step forward, lost his footing, fell, and, dropping his torch at my feet, rolled swiftly out of sight down the sloping way, his round body picking up the clay like a snowball adds to its bulk as it hurtles down a hillside.

To save my soul I couldn't help it—I roared. There was a crash in the distance like the breaking of dry branches before a fleeing deer, and then the count's voice:

"Laugh, you damned hyena," came cheerily up to me; "I've fallen into a boneyard. Wrap my torch in your shirt and throw it down to me."

"Hadn't I better come down?"

"Don't! don't!" he yelled. "It's slippery as ice! You'll have to get a rope to haul me out!"

I raised my own light high above my head and, putting his torch into a bundle with my shirt, threw to where I could dimly discern his figure, a glittering white globe below me. The bundle fell short. In vain he tried to climb up the slippery incline to it, while I howled with laughter; then, abandoning his attempts, he began to dig steps in the slime with a large, pointed bone. In half an hour he had progressed to where my shirt lay, and then, as the easiest mode of locomotion, rolled back to the bottom again.

The snapping on of his light showed the walls clearly. It was nothing more than a shoot down which he had fallen, a shoot paved with luminous, white phosphorescent clay all the way to the bottom, where it ended in a chamber twenty feet in circumference and literally filled with bones. They were banked up the sides, protruding from the ground. The little fat man was standing on them.

As he pulled the gruesome relics about the Russian growled out short sentences, "Damned guanacos again! Rabbit! A jaguar femur—what should that be doing here? Pete! Pete! I've found it, and part of the skin on it! A *mylodon!* A *mylodon* without question!"

"Hurrah for the *mylodon*!" I shouted enthusiastically. "I'll go back now and get a rope, and meanwhile, you work as far up the slide as you can. Tomorrow, we'll arrange some kind of a light in here and dig the whole thing up."

"All right!" he yelled. "Hurry back, though! It isn't pleasant, being left alone in the bowels of the earth!"

I TIED the cord to a projecting piece of rock and turned back, letting the twine run through my fingers as I walked. Not twenty feet around the next corner, my torch suddenly went out, the battery exhausted. Great God, but it was dark! The sweat poured from my bare shoulders in spite of the fact that it would only mean leaving Bones alone in the darkness if I took his torch, and there were other batteries to recharge the lights in our packs.

Slowly, both hands cramped to the cord, I went forward. It seemed as though I had been groping on for centuries. Once the string snapped out of my hands, and I threw myself on the ground panting with fear until I found it again. At last, after I felt I had been long enough in the cave

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to be classed as a prehistoric animal myself, the cord slackened, light showed ahead, the flickering illumination of a fire, and I instantly decided our white bearers had returned. With a shout, I dropped the limp cord and ducked into the main cave.

I had only time to see seven tall figures facing me around a fire, when strong hands grasped me on either side. Furiously, I struck out, then tried to drag my automatic from under my left arm. Down I went with two big men on top of me, and in less time than it takes to tell I was trussed up like a fowl and dragged to the fire.

There were nine great Patagonians, seven men and two women, grouped about me, dressed in mantles fashioned from guanaco skins and armed with knives, old muskets and bolas.

Beside the fire, nearly at my feet, lay a tenth savage, an immense man, but thin to the point of extreme emaciation—dead.

The younger woman (she was a right good-looking savage for all her six feet of height) whispered excitedly to the elder. The men regarded me silently.

"What the devil does this mean?" I sputtered in Spanish. "Turn me loose at once!"

"You'll have to get your devil to turn you loose," a man sneered at me in the same tongue. "We shall not. You have come into the cave of the Sacred Moon and disturbed those who were sleeping. To-morrow you die in honor of the one who lies before you."

Nice, wasn't it? End of Pete Wells, Esq., sacrificed to the glory of a Patagonian stiff with no clothes on, and buried in a cave haunted by the ghosts of prehistoric animals! I lost my temper.

"You don't say?" I remarked sarcastically. "Well, my devil *will* be here, and he'll make you turn somersaults under the 'Sacred Moon'."

"Aren't you afraid?" curiously asked the man nearest me.

"Not of you," I answered furiously, and, twisting one leg free, applied my foot forcibly to the pit of his stomach.

It was a fool thing to do, and he was on me in a second with raised knife. I thought my last moment had come, but the others pulled him away.

"No blood must be shed in the cave of the Sacred Moon," said the elder woman sternly. "To-morrow we will see to him. Now let us bury our dead."

Muttering evilly, my assailant stepped aside. Raising the dead man, the others carried him to a shallow depression near the wall and unceremoniously scratched sand over him. Then, while the men stood in a circle and swayed before the dying fire, the girl began to sing in the corrupted Spanish that seems to have taken the place of the Patagonian tongue, if there ever was one:

"Night has come that ends not,
Night has come to thee,
With the Great One quickly
Thy spirit wanders free.
Body lies in sacred ground,
Spirit will fly soon
Where the light is softest,
Up to the bright, round moon.

"Where the light is softest,
Up to the bright, round moon."

The other savages crooned in unison, swaying back and forth and then settling to the ground.

There was a long silence, and the girl's voice again rose:

"Night has come that ends not,
Thou wilt go on high
Where the light gleams always
In the darkest sky.
Earth will hold thy body,
Ever and for ay;
Spirit goes a floating
Where the moonbeams play.

"Spirit goes a floating
Where the moonbeams play."

I shifted my position painfully, and felt something hard beneath my elbow. It was the shovel to which I had tied the guiding cord for our expedition into the cave, and, rolling further over, I sawed the rope that bound my arms against its point. The edge of the moon came down over the top of the entrance to the cave, and again the girl began to sing:

"Night has come that ends not,
But she comes, her light,
Silver sparkling pathway,
Guides thy steps aright.
Sacred, O most sacred!
Shines on sea and dune,
Sacred, O most sacred,
Bright and shining moon.

"Sacred, O most sacred!
Bright and shining moon."

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The silvery disk outside lowered, filling the foreground of the cave with light. The ceremony evidently over, the Patagonians rose to their feet, and two of them stepped across the dead fire towards me.

The rope about my right arm was sawed through. With numbed fingers, I tried to draw my automatic from under my left armpit. The shovel slid from beneath me, began to progress into the darkness at the end of its cord.

With a flash of inspiration I pointed my free arm towards it.

"Look!" I howled. "Look! I send the senseless wood and iron for my devil! Tremble, fools, he is coming, the devil, the devil . . . from the moon!" I added as a happy afterthought.

Came a roar of fury from the blackness behind us.

"What in hell do you mean by leaving me this way, Pete Wells? What is all this row?"

There was the glare of an electric torch, and from its light emerged Bones. Great Caesar's ghost, but he nearly scared me!

His whiskers were plastered with mud and blood running from his freely bleeding nose; his great round body was one luminous mass of shiny white clay, and he lurched forward like a Bacchanalian moon, spitting curses at every step.

With a simultaneous yell of terror the savages dived for the entrance of the cave. I jerked out my automatic and fired at the rock above them, bringing down a piece in their midst. The mouth of the cave cleared like magic, and Bones stood over me, throwing his light on the motionless figure of the girl, who lay stunned by the fragment of rock that my bullet had brought down.

We revived our captive with a dash of water in her face, none the worse save for a lump on the side of her head, and decided to hold her as hostage for the present in case any of her friends returned. As a matter of fact, she showed no inclination to escape—just sat still, watching Bones with awe-filled eyes. Even when he had exchanged his glittering, clay-coated garments for prosaic khaki, it was evident she still looked on him as some kind of a god—or devil.

We slept across the entrance of the cave, guns beneath our hands, and save that the Russian conversed steadily about mylodons in his sleep, it was a perfectly quiet night.

MORNING found us penetrating into the cave, the Patagonian maid walking ahead with both of the packs which our bearers had abandoned. She picked them up unbidden, and didn't seem to consider their weight at all. Also the darkness evidently caused her no fear, since she kept on the very edge of the illumination thrown by our torches.

The top of the slippery clay chute where I had left Bones the night before presented an entirely different appearance in the daytime. The sunlight streamed down through the aperture in the rock above, and even lit the cell-like chamber at the bottom of the incline. The rude steps by which Bones had escaped were now overrun by the slimy clay, but we found it a simple matter to dig with our shovels a somewhat slippery but practical stairway to the bottom.

Then we really began to work. Not a bone was missing from the skeleton of the mylodon, and, furthermore, there were six square feet of skin, vivid and green, and studded on the inside with small bosses of bone, showing, the count said, that the animal had a rudimentary protecting shell beneath its fur, something after the fashion of an armadillo.

It was a happy fat man that collected this fifteen-foot skeleton, the bones in perfect preservation, even with pieces of sinew attached.

By relays, the girl silently doing more than her part, we transported the pieces into the main cave, and then it was noon. Lunch quickly gobbled, we went back to our excavating, and not another thing rewarded us. The rest of the bones, down to solid rock, proved to be of guanacos, jaguars, dogs and rabbits, not one single remnant dating back even a few thousand years.

"Don't understand it at all, Pete," complained the count. "Why should a mylodon's bones be mixed with those of modern animals? I can understand their being well preserved, because of the extraordinary conditions in the cave, but why mixed with modern animals, when all authorities claim mylodons have been extinct for a thousand years?"

"Simple enough," I answered. "Why couldn't one of your little pets have survived until recently, and then have been driven to suicide through loneliness, and jumped down that hole?"

"Why isn't the moon made of green cheese, as you English say?" disgustedly asked Bones.

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"In the first place, I am an American, *not* an Englishman," I flared up, on my ear at once, "and, in the second place how are you going to prove the moon isn't made of green cheese or bacon rinds, as far as that goes?"

"It simply isn't," he snarled.

"How are you going to prove it? How are you going to prove that there isn't a mylodon sitting outside the cave this minute? You've got to *show* me."

The Lord knows it was silly, but we were both red hot by that time and shouting at the top of our voices. Glaring at one another, we both opened our mouths again at exactly the same time, thought better of it and snapped them shut. Then we went back into the main cave, where the count began to wrap his treasures in yards of thin, oiled silk, and staked the piece of skin out flat on the ground to dry. I built a fire from wood the girl collected and started to cook our evening meal.

All day long that Patagonian woman had toiled with us, carrying enormous burdens, collecting fuel, and had never once opened her lips to speak. So noiseless and unobtrusive had she been, in spite of her great height and splendid proportions, that we really hardly noticed her.

Subconsciously I had been aware that she seldom took her eyes from the little fat man, and when we had hauled out that piece of green fur I felt, rather than saw, her start. Now that the skin was pegged out flat and Bones had come to the fire, I could dimly discern her in the darkness kneeling by it, her arms stretched up to the roof of the cave.

We had finished our meal and lit our pipes, when there came from behind us a soft crooning:

"Ou-ou, ou-ou, ou-u-u,
Ou-ou, ou-ou, ou-u-u."

Then, very softly at first, growing in volume with every note, the savage girl began to sing:

"Moon, moon; moon, moon,
Bright with fire and white with snow.
Moon, moon; moon, moon,
Look down here below.
By thy sacred sheep I kneel,
Lest some wicked one should steal
What is thine— Heed my appeal!
Moon, moon; moon, moon."

Bones started to rise, but I pulled him back. A beam of moonlight showed the kneeling figure, face bowed to the green skin. Once more she raised her hands above her head, and again her lips opened:

"Messenger to earth thou sends,
Moon, moon, O sacred moon.
Lowly to him my heart bends,
Moon, moon, O sacred moon.
I, thy daughter; soon will go
Through the cold, and ice, and snow,
Where the molten streamlets glow,
Where thy sheep are grazing slow,
Sacred flocks to tend."

Her voice sank at the end. Came the softly crooned *"Ou-ou, ou-ou, ou-u-u,"* then silence.

"Let me talk to her. I have an idea." I whispered to Bones, a wild suspicion growing in my mind, and I called out in Spanish.

She came at once and stood before us. Straight as a mountain pine, six feet tall, head high, and great eyes fixed on my face, the woman was without fear, without servility, and yet was dominated, in the grip of a power she could not understand. Her apparent mental attitude might perhaps be paralleled with that of a child who obeys willingly, though it knows not why. She was really beautiful, too, that dark, splendidly strong girl, beautiful like a heroic statue.

"Do you want to go back to your people?" I asked.

"My lord's servant knows I cannot, since I have looked on him," she answered, turning her great eyes towards Bones.

"What will you do when we leave here?"

"Tend the sheep of the Sacred Moon with those so old they are no longer of the tribe."

"Where are these sheep?"

"Beyond the snow, and ice, and fire."

"We will go with you in the morning. Sleep now."

"As my lord wills," and she drew back into the darkness of the cave.

"What do you make of that?" I demanded excitedly of the Russian.

"Well, I don't know. The tribe has sheep some place that the very old people tend. I suppose the girl is kind of taboo through associating with us. Don't see why we should waste time running after the sheep, though."

"What kind of sheep do you suppose the sheep of the Sacred Moon are?"

"I don't know. You can't mean. . . . Oh, you're crazy Pete!"

"Crazy or not, I'm going to find out,"

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I answered. "What was she singing about, if not that Irish-colored fur? I'm going to see those sheep. Can't prove the moon isn't made of green cheese, but I can and will run this down."

The silk-wrapped bones and piece of skin were left at the little farm with the old-old man, who when he heard we were going down the coast with the girl announced that they would come in handy for fertilizer—said we wouldn't return to claim them. Even the Patagonians who went that way were never seen again. With this cheerful prophecy as a send-off, packs stripped down to the bare necessities, but still with our shovels and mattocks, we set out.

I have been on many a hike in my life, but never one to touch that. Our guide first led us several miles back from the sea, and then turned due north. All day, we followed a trail along the barren rocks of the coast zone—rather a line than a trail, since it was but three inches wide. The Patagonian easily covered the ground, walking, as do most savages, with a swing to her hips that enabled her to put one foot almost directly in front of the other. To us, following that narrow path was like walking a tight rope. How the fat man did it I really don't know; it must have been an agony of effort for him. Nevertheless, from sun up till dark his great round body progressed steadily on before me.

That night we slept in a cave where bubbled up a spring of sulphur-laden, boiling water, and we slept hard.

AT DAWN, our trail wound up through the forest from which we emerged; at noon the mountains towered high above us. Crossing a swampy tundra, we descended a gentle dip, and stood on the edge of an immense glacier, smooth, straight, reaching down in steep incline to where sparkled, miles and miles away, the waters of the Pacific.

Here the girl paused and, pointing out a peak across the ice, indicated that a path must be cut towards it. Our mattocks and shovels came into play, and while the woman and I hewed a way in the ice, the Russian shoveled out the fragments behind us, tossing them on the smooth surface, along which they slid towards the sea, their tinkle growing fainter and fainter until swallowed up in the distance. Darkness caught us still laboring, and we were forced to spend the night on the edge of the glacier, doubly cold through comparison with the glowing reflection of a volcano on the night sky.

As soon as it was light enough to see, we were at it again. A great wall of vapor or steam rose on the opposite side of the glacier, ending abruptly at the point where our path was aimed. By two o'clock we were safely across, and paused in awe at the panorama spread before us.

The glacier was held by a thin ridge of rock, on the other side of which ran a broad stream of boiling water gushing out from a cavern beneath our feet. Above hung a cloud of vaporous steam, spreading out over a valley and completely hiding it, while on every side towered snow-capped mountains. The whole place looked like a great pit filled to the top with snow.

"How long do you suppose the rock will hold the ice back from the valley?" I asked Bones in a whisper. Somehow, it didn't seem right to speak aloud in the immensity of all things.

"Don't know," he answered. "The ice has been grinding at one side, the stream wearing at the other, probably for thousands of years. This place seems like the beginning of the world."

We crossed above where the boiling spring gushed out from the cavern, and found grass growing luxuriantly not ten feet from the glacier. Along the bank of the stream the girl led, with us following, the land sloping gently downward, the precipice rising higher and higher on the opposite bank. Once, the count touched my shoulder and pointed to a great fissure in the rocky wall fully a yard wide, seemingly created that very moment, ice squeezing through it at the top and melting, drop by drop, to fall hissing on the seething water below.

The grass rose to our thighs, to our shoulders; trees appeared, then dense thickets, tangled, lush, green. Our leader turned at right angles and plunged into the vegetation. The cloud of vapor seemed to be resting on the tree tops. It shut off the sky, and, condensing, fell steadily in an infinitesimally fine rain.

We walked in a humid, breathlessly hot mist. The trail opened into a broad, hard-beaten road, flat as though crushed down with a roller. On either side rose enormous trees hung with lianas and orchids, beneath them a nearly impenetrable tangle of underbrush thirty feet high, sappy, living green, save for splashes of the white, crimson or gold orchids.

"Here pasture the sheep of the Sacred Moon, here shall I dwell forever," spoke the girl.

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"Where are the sheep?" I demanded.

As if in answer came a crash close to the road, and the underbrush swayed. Breathless, I glanced at Bones, but his staring eyes were riveted on something above my head.

"Wheet-wheet, wheet-wheet," came a tiny voice from the tree tops, and I looked up straight into a face peering down at me. And what a face! The round, yellow, foolish eyes were set well up in the narrow, greenish forehead; two flat, sniffing nostrils expanded and closed above a thick-lipped, vacuous mouth, from which protruded a long, slender, blue tongue, like a piece of satin ribbon. Never have I seen anything that portrayed such complete imbecility as that face!

"The utter damned fool!" I heard myself say aloud.

"Wheet-wheet," came the ridiculously tiny voice, the underbrush parted, and an immense bulk moved out into the open.

If you could have forgotten the idiot face (which you couldn't), I suppose the mere size of the animal would have made it impressive. It was as big as an elephant, as an elephant sitting on its haunches. The hind legs were enormous, doubled under it, and ending in great, flat paws; the back was curved, nearly humped; the forelegs were short, powerful, and armed with stupendous claws; the neck was long, a cord dangling from it, and topped by that fool head, maddeningly out of proportion to the bulk of the rest of the animal; while the entire body was covered with short, very green fur.

"Heavenly saints!" breathed the Russian. "It's a mylodon come back from the birth of time—utterly different from what we have conceived, but a mylodon; yes, a *mylodon;* a *mylodon;* yes, a *mylodon*. . . ."

He kept repeating "A *mylodon;* yes, a *mylodon,*" till my nerves snapped like cotton thread.

"Nobody said it was a teakettle!" I roared. "Supposing it is a mylodon, what in hell are you going to do with it?"

"We'll go on further," the little man answered, as though talking in his sleep, and paying not the slightest attention to my words; "perhaps we'll find something else."

"Heaven forbid!" I piously ejaculated. "This is enough for me!"

The creature let itself down on all fours, and with a final silly "Wheet-wheet" half hopped, half walked into the jungle, while we continued down the road in the dripping mist.

The ground rose and the trees became more scattered. A great cave opened in the mountainside and, pausing before it, the girl called out.

From within came eight Patagonians, seven men and one woman, or rather eight relics of the past. They were the oldest human beings I have ever looked upon—bent, gnarled, wrinkled, not one could have been less than a hundred years old. Peering out from age-bleared eyes, they blinked at us like an assembly of galvanized mummies.

"I come to watch the sheep," the girl said tonelessly, "and he" —pointing at Bones— "is a messenger from the Sacred Moon who would see how we tend our charges."

"You are overyoung to leave the tribe never to return," the withered hag mumbled.

"My lord brought me here," the girl answered simply.

Within the cavern it was dark as pitch and dripping wet. Another pleasant discovery we made was that nothing would burn.

Tree and shrub were too full of sap; there was no dead dry wood, just wet decay. The Patagonians evidently lived entirely on fruits, and it was on fruits that we dined.

DUSK was approaching, indicated by an evener opaqueness in the midst and less condensation into rain. The nine Patagonians, our guide included, moved off down the road. The count busied himself putting his camera to rights, grumbling aloud meanwhile about the difficulty of taking pictures in that perpetually cloudy atmosphere and cursing the fates that he had but one flashlight powder. I pressed the moisture out of my clothes between two flat stones.

Suddenly a perfect chorus of "Wheet-wheets" broke on our ears, and the most extraordinary procession man has ever looked upon defiled up the road.

Each of the old, old Patagonians was leading—yes, *leading*—a mylodon by a rope around its slim neck, the girl bringing up the rear with a cunning little one, evidently very young and merely some six or seven feet tall. The other eight colossal green beasts ran in size from fifteen to twenty feet, the largest, the only male in the bunch, having a kind of a crest of upright bristles along its back. Past us they wheeled into the cavern—round, yellow eyes gazing aimlessly in every direction,

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blue, ribbony tongues hanging from vacuous mouths.

"Hea-venly days!" I ejaculated, and sat down in a puddle. The count's eyes were popping from his head, and he began to repeat something in Russian that may have been a prayer, but sounded like the sputtering of a dynamite fuse. I recovered my senses first.

"Come on!" I commanded. "Let's see the little dears tucked into their beddies—and then drink the bottle of brandy we brought along for medicine. I know I'm sick—symptoms, a strange belief in things I *do* see but that *can't* be true."

We followed the procession into the blackness, electric torches in hand, and came to a further cave that was nearly dry. Here the Indians were slipping the ropes loosely about stakes driven in the ground. The great beasts loomed up under our lights like green mountains, and the glare of the electricity brought forth a disturbed chorus of the ridiculous, tiny cries. Their guardians angrily motioned us back, and we retreated outside.

"This, Pete, is the greatest thing that has happened in science for five hundred years!" exclaimed Bones. "Let's bend every thought and energy to getting the most out of it. We'll find out all we can from the girl, and then, when the savages are asleep, steal in and take a flashlight of that sleeping flock of prehistoric survivors."

As we talked, a change came over the sky. The cloud of vapor caught the rays of the setting sun and reflected them through in countless rainbows of every color in the spectrum. Out into the beautiful illumination came the Patagonians and, grouping in a circle, with the old hag in the middle, sang a kind of an evening hymn:

"O sacred moon now rising,
(Alas, we cannot see!)
All day we faithful tended
Thy holy flocks for thee.
Now night comes in its glory,
Forget us not below,
Remember thy great promise
That death we shall not know."

After this lyric rendering, we called the girl to us and put her through a long interrogation. It was rather difficult to get things straightened out, because she assumed we knew so many things of which we were ignorant. Finally, however, a chain of information was evolved.

When first she knew of the vapor-hidden valley there were only two mylodons. The other seven sprang from the original pair. The legend was that as long as there were mylodons so long would those who tended them live, and the Patagonian race as a whole survive. Their ever present anxiety was that something would happen to the old male, the only representative of his sex, all his progeny having been females.

Of course, Patagonians died outside the valley and were buried in the cave of the Sacred Moon, the girl conceded, and sometimes those within the valley, through their infirmities, became tired of living and slipped quietly into the boiling stream, but no one there was obliged to die. Within the records of the tribe the old woman had been there a hundred and then forty snows. Once a year all the Patagonians came to the valley to count the moon sheep. They were due very soon now, she concluded, and would worship the messenger of the Sacred Moon with song and dance.

After the girl had retired, we sat outside the cave steaming in the hot, wet darkness, and talked things over. Without an argument we agreed that it was too great a risk to trust to Bones' clay-created godhead for our safety and await the arrival of the able-bodied Patagonians. What we had to do must be done quickly. That very night we would take the flashlight photograph within the cave, and the next day use the balance of our films in the forest.

For two hours, in order that the savages might all be asleep, we waited, and then, slipping off our shoes, stole within the cave. The way was easy to find even without a light, our feet feeling the solid path beaten by the weight of the monsters, and we knew at once, when we were inside the second cavern, by a roaring like the sea, the snoring of the great beasts. Then I snapped on my torch so Bones could set up his camera. With the flood of light, first one then another of the mylodons awoke and rose to its feet, looming up monstrous shadows whence came weird twitterings. I stepped back of Bones and spread the flashlight dust inside my tobacco pouch, the only dry thing I had. Match after match refused to light, then one flickered and blazed up, and I dropped it into the powder.

There was a puffing blind of light showing the terror-stricken eyes of the immense animals turned toward us, the click

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of the camera shutter, then darkness shaken by a mighty tread. I pressed the button of my torch and jerked Bones, the camera in his arms, against the wall of the cave. The mylodons were thundering down on us like an avalanche, and the air was full of their shrill calls, while from the distance came the frightened cries of the Patagonians.

Hours we leaned motionless against the rock, scarce daring to breathe, then stole silently to the entrance of the cave and, rolling in our wet blankets, waited for dawn.

No matter how great the excitement sleep will not be denied to tired, healthy men, and we both dropped off just as the vapor outside began to whiten. The next I knew, I woke to a wailing as though of lost souls, sat up to find it broad daylight, and Bones bending over me.

"Something terrible has happened, from the sound those savages are making," he whispered. "Keep your gun ready and let's go see."

I followed him out into the fine drizzle, and we turned down the broad road. The old, old Patagonians were rolling on the ground and raising their hands to heaven in frantic sorrow. Before them lay the male mylodon dead, its neck broken where it had collided with a giant forest tree in the darkness.

The mourners paid no attention to us; just kept up their horrible wailing interjected with broken plaints:

"The father of the sheep of the Sacred Moon is gone, is gone, and soon we, too, shall be no more. . . . We, who hoped to live forever, must die. . . ."

LEAVING the frantic savages, we went back and got the camera, passed down the road unmolested, and plunged into the jungle. It was easy to locate where the monsters were feeding from the crash of breaking treees and the swaying of the underbrush, but quite another matter to photograph them. In the first place their color blended so perfectly with the lush green of the forest that, in spite of their bulk, it was very hard to see them; then again, we could never get all of a mylodon at once because of the thickness of the vegetation.

Finally, when we reached the spot where the first monster had been seen on our entrance into the valley, we decided that the only practical plan was to lead one out into the road and snap it there. Plunging into the underbrush, we fought our way through to where the tree tops were waving, and I took hold of the rope that hung from a mylodon's neck, not without inward quakings. It followed me like a lamb. When we were nearly out of the underbrush, Bones raised his hand.

"Wait," he whispered; "I hear something."

So did I. From the direction of the glacier came the sound of many voices singing. Nearer it came, till we could distinguish the words:

"Children of moon are we,
Fear not the darkest shade,
Trusting, O moon, to thee,
Of darkness unafraid.

"Come to thy cloudland
Where thy flocks be,
There, hand in hand,
To worship thee."

Peeking out through the tree trunks, we saw an entire tribe of splendid Patagonians file by—warriors, women and children, and not an adult under six feet.

We lay still in the woods until the mylodon began to graze and nearly pulled a tree down on top of us.

"Oh, hell," I broke the silence; "we're in for it now, Count. There isn't a chance of getting away if that bunch gets after us. All we can do is to shoot as many of 'em as we are able before going under. Let's lead Irene, here, to the road. You snap her till you're tired, and then we'll beat it."

Out in the open, I tied the cord to a tree, and standing behind Bones, whistled so the beast would turn its idiotic face toward us. The count took picture after picture from every angle, and while he was doing it a mad plan had occurred to me.

"Look here, Bones," I stuttered; "let's take this prehistoric silly with us. She'll serve as a breastwork to get behind if we have to fight. I know it's like stealing a whole church, but I'll try anything once."

The Russian gave a whoop of joy.

"Pete, I never thought of it! If we get your Irene to the coast we'll be the most famous men on two continents."

Down that road we went, Bones leading, through the brush and out by the flow of boiling water, the mylodon following docilely at the end of the rope. Across the hot stream, the crack in the side of the precipice was now twenty feet wide, and great masses of ice were pushing through. I saw Bones glance at it apprehensively

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and shake his head. Over the rock, whence gushed the water, we climbed, and out on to the path we had cut in the glacial ice. And here we had to go more slowly. The beast's great pads kept slipping on the smooth surface, and her foolish face was contracted with fear at the cold beneath her feet.

"Stop a minute," I suggested, "and let Irene rest."

"All right. I'll take a snap of you leading her, with the glacier for background."

I felt the ice tremble under my feet as the camera clicked.

"Get up, old girl," I clucked, jerking at the cord.

The mylodon did not move. She lifted from the ice first one enormous cold foot, then another, swinging her foolish head from side to side, and uttering her inadequate, plaintive cry. Then she started to lie down.

"For God's sake, don't do that," I yelled, jerking at the rope; "you'll slide clear to the coast."

Paying no attention to my frantic yanks, down she went on her side, lifted her feet in the air and turned on to her great, round back, then rolled ponderously over and tried to scramble to her feet. She slipped, the rope pulling through my hands; recovered herself, slid, whirled about and went swiftly down the steep incline, gathering impetus with every second.

There was a mad chorus of yells behind us. The Patagonians were climbing on to the ice. I felt the glacier heave. With a terrific crash the barrier of rock on the shore gave way. Half the glacier, splitting from the main body, went over into the boiling stream, carrying our pursuers with it.

The mylodon was a speck in the distance, growing rapidly smaller against the sparkle of the Pacific.

How the count and I reached solid ground, I do not clearly remember. I have some vague recollection of hitting him on the point of the jaw to keep him from following the mylodon, and then running across the ice, his hand in mine. Anyway, when we were up on the bank, the glacier splitting into fragments below us, he was crying like a child. And cry he did for two whole days, his mind seemingly quite gone.

I lost the trail we had followed coming in, and had to strike for the coast by compass. The rest was one long agony of going forward, always forward, through the forest, across another glacier, over a bleak, boulder-strewn land, and then coming to a little white settlement on the seashore. There a British tramp steamer picked us up and landed us at Valparaiso, where for two months I nursed Bones through a raging brain fever.

An end comes to everything if you wait long enough. Time found us on a passenger steamer for San Francisco, but we were not the same men. At least the Russian wasn't the same. Every recollection of what had happened to us had been wiped from his mind. He knew who he was, who I was, and was rational in every other respect, but he didn't know where he had been or why.

When I called him rational in every respect, I told a lie. He had gone plumb dippy over women. Before we landed I found out that he was engaged to all three of the unmarried girls on the boat.

At San Francisco I took the train across the continent to Jacksonville. Bones hated to have me go; begged me to come to Russia with him at any salary I cared to name; said he was going to get married and settle down. I told him that, with his fund of feminine appreciation, Russia would never do for him; he'd end up in Turkey, and I'd never be able to live happily in a land where the women wore trousers.

At parting he presented me with a magnificent watch, and I never saw him again.

Jacksonville certainly looked good to me. The second evening I sat in Swartz's Café, with the old Dutchman himself across from me, and started to tell him of my adventures. As a preliminary I passed over the flashlight of the mylodons Bones had taken in the cave. Swartz looked at it a moment, and then asked:

"A new kind of mice, *nicht wahr?*"

I picked up the photograph and examined it. There stood the mylodons, just as I had seen them when the powder flashed, but, unless you had known it, there was no means of gauging their size, nothing in the picture with which to compare them. I opened my mouth to explain, and then shut it again.

"Yes, a new kind of mouse," I agreed. The story of my wanderings, I improved.

Up in my room that night, I gazed for a long time at the snapshot of me leading Irene, the lady mylodon, across the glacier. Then, with a sigh, I hid it in the very bottom of my trunk.

What was the use?

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(Continued from page 67)

F.N. or F.F.M. to have used a novelette which broadly surpassed the lead novel. But anything that can better Brand's original style and works must be exceptional and it's really a formidable challenge when any other author's work has to be published simultaneously with any of Brand's yarns.

Relatively speaking, a representation of more of Max (Frederick Faust) Brand's works within the famous confines of F.N., F.F.M. or the Merritt Mag would not be in the least bit an untoward sign of promiscuity, since, I for one, could never tire of Brand day in or day out.

The mere fact that we were given about nine and a half pages of letters and the editorial, was immensely gratifying, since, no doubt you present the most lively, interesting and informative letter columns this side of the world, or, this side of the Solar System, for that matter. Along with R. C. Mainfort, I wish to side in the matter of having trimmed edges and the smooth paper, in profusion, since this form of *papier* seems to run in between issues of every mag helter-skelter, and you might as well go completely overboard rather than torture us smooth paper fiends by having it appear in short gasps and grunts every so often.

Being that announcements are apparently becoming a medium of common expression within these columns, I would like to have all and every reader of this fine periodical take note of the fact that the National Science Fantasy Society has membership open to all earnest and serious fans of STFantasy literature. Our only stipulation to prospective and future members is that only fans *sincerely interested* in STFantasy activities can join, and not mere curiosity seekers. I bring this point out, since, some that write for membership are prone to believe that one "has to read STFantasy fiction only in order to be a fan". Contrary to this general belief, one must share in activities, such as: Swapping, correspondence, organizing and forming local chapters and many other things that true fans are interested in.

It isn't necessary to take part in more than one or two activities as long as the interest of the member is genuine. Further details and information will be gladly given to all questions without any obligation, and all of us in the N.S.F.S. believe that with the proper cooperation and enthusiasm from fans, our club might be the greatest that's ever evolved out of STFandom, due to the many activities and services we offer.

CALVIN THOS. BECK
President of the Nat. Science Fant. Society.
P.O. Box 877,
Grand Central Station,
New York 17, N. Y.

WANTS BACK ISSUE

Owing to currency regulations I find it impossible to purchase the American F.F.M. and have to rely on English reprints which have just started to appear—I was very fortunate to purchase ten old copies at an exorbitant price. May I say that I—and my near friends who are clamouring for my finished copies—enjoy very much the contents of these magazines?

Now for a request—have you a spare copy of "Seven Footprints to Satan" you could let me have? I would be very grateful for this—I have been trying to read it for a very long time. Hope you can help me.

A. J. MANNIX.
159 Guinness Trust Bldgs.,
Fulham Palace Road,
Hammersmith, London W.6,
England.

Editor's Note: We have no more copies of this story, but perhaps some reader has one to offer.

THANKS FROM ENGLAND

I am just crawling out from under an enormous pile of correspondence to thank you very much for printing my last letter in the March issue of *Fantastic Novels*.

The response has been overwhelming, but very, very satisfying. I have already opened up definite deals with six folk, and preliminary negotiations with above forty others; four packages of mags have been received, and some half dozen books which I happened to have in stock despatched. Of course, as it was only a bright scheme, I did not load myself heavily with books—but now I wish I had! It would have saved me half the correspondence I've had to enter into, ordering fresh books!

However, this letter is supposed to be an expression of thanks, and not a record of trials and tribulations, so thank you very much.

I'm glad that so many people have taken me seriously over this—I am afraid only too many folk this side are prone to "beg"—no other word will describe it—magazines from U.S.A. fans. Well, Britain may be hard up for many things, but I am pretty certain she can at least swap back some books for mags. In any case, I long ago came to the conclusion that we had scrounged enough! The most fantastic thing in the world today is the economic situation—but I'll skip that.

Most pleasant surprise from your chain to date was Challis' "The Smoking Land." Nice selection. Was not so struck on the Haggard in Feb. F.F.M. but then over here Haggard is part of our childhood diet. Ray Cummings' "Man Who Mastered Time" in March F.N. was better, but I always find Cummings' time-travel stuff too paradoxical. Or not sufficiently p. I'm not sure which, but it never seems to hang together without lots of glue. The shorts recently have all been tip-top "borderline" tales, and I much prefer them to your long story selections.

Fantastically,
KEN SLATER.
Capt. K. F. Slater,
13 Gp. R.P.C.,
B.A.O.R., 23,
c/o G.P.O.,
England.

FINLAY EXCELLENT

To say I was disappointed with "The Flying Legion" is the understatement of the year. It was by far the worst story I've read in our mag yet. And I would like to know what's fantastic

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about it? A lurid adventure yarn, yes, but no fantasy. The characters were completely cold to me. The "master's" self importance got on my nerves, in fact the whole legion acted like a pack of storm troopers.

"The Man Who Mastered Time" was more to my taste. The short was fair, run-of-the-mill horror stuff.

The cover was lousy, but Finlay's pics for the Cummings' yarn were excellent, especially pages 39 and 65.

How about going off the trail with some really different stuff? Like: "The Hill of Dreams" by Machen, "Land That Time Forgot" by Burroughs or Oliver Onions' "Tower of Oblivion."

Well, I'll cut short now and wish you a happy half century.

ROY HALE.

St. Paul, Minn.

LIKED BRAND NOVELETTE

I am in the same mood which usually afflicts me after reading some of the classic fantasy that you usually publish, but unfortunately it is not because I have been reading "The Man Who Mastered Time," which was unworthy of publication in F.N. I am about two-thirds through Haggard's "Pearl Maiden," a story which I would suggest for publication in F.F.M. except that publication would most certainly entail a large amount of cutting, which would definitely be blasphemous. For some reason, although that book is written in Haggard's usual voluble style, unlike "Morning Star" of the last F.F.M., I am enjoying "Pearl Maiden," while I've only gotten to chapter four of the reprint: the reason for my epistolean absence last month.

Now that I've sufficiently garbled up my first paragraph, and caused most letter-readers to skip to the next missive, I'll go on and comment on the stories.

First of all, "That Receding Brow." I've noticed a definite trend lately in F.N. and F.F.M. toward publishing some of Faust's fantasy. "The Smoking Land" in the current A.M.F.M. was inferior, but this particular novelette was, I would judge, one of his better fantasy tales. There are a few minor points which I'd like to bring up, such as the fact that no reputable scientist ever believes for one moment that homo sapiens descended from the ape, but save for that particular one, I shall let the others rest in tranquillity. The scientific theory—as even Darwin expressed it, I believe, and certainly as the later erudites modified his hypothesis—stipulates only that Man and Ape descended from a common ancestor, unlike both of them, and that, speaking figuratively, ape is not man's brother, as is so often opined, but his cousin.

Other than that minor flaw—and it *is* a minor one—"That Receding Brow" was superb, especially in the handling of the finish, except that it seems to me that Thorwalt was not especially bright—which characteristic might also be reflected in his methods of handling animals. This story is the best of its length you have published since the "Burl" stories.

Oh, yes; the novel. Well, to be fair, I must admit that I read it over rather hurriedly, and also that I was prejudiced against its author from the beginning. He had a rather good idea, but he messed it up. In fact, I think he rather over-wrote the ending. That was my opinion as I scanned it; I may change my mind sometime, and if I do, I shall mention it in a letter. But I doubt it. No, I fear the story is too out-dated.

En passant, may I mention one rather outstanding flaw? The flight back and forth through time was likened to traveling in space, save that it was merely a different type of medium through which they traversed. There was acceleration, and there were results from that acceleration comparable to and corresponding with the results from over-acceleration in space. Therefore, it seems reasonable that an inertia through time should result, and that a slowing down of their speed would be necessary to adjust to a normal time rate.

That is borne out by the description of their flight: how, because of the acceleration, the velocity constantly was increasing; it could not do this unless there were an inertia of motion, and thus the "speed" of the time machine could not be reduced by the simple expedient of stopping the acceleration; a period of deceleration approximately the same length as the period of acceleration would be necessary. If they did not decelerate, they would merely "coast" through time at the same speed at which they had been going when the power was shut off, eventually slowed perhaps by forces as comparable with friction in regard to space.

Otherwise the story was adequate, except in the portrayal of "Georgie." Gad, why couldn't he have been called George? In the beginning of the story, 17-year-old Georgie acts more like I did when I was about eleven, and at the end he acts somewhat like a person of about 21. But then that is not uncommon among science-fiction authors.

The cover, except that it was another one of those "symbolic" monstrosities, is excellent. The Finlay illo on pages 10-11 is good, even for him, but his others are only fair. The Leydenfrost illustration was pretty good, too.

H-mm. Are there any of your readers who thinks he or she can write good fantasy, but doesn't have the initiative to try? There are always fanzines, you know, and I am editor of a new one called *Fan-Fare*.

Unlike most zines, this one has a purpose, a very definite one: to aid science-fantasy writers who are only amateurs.

W. PAUL GANLEY.

119 Ward Road,
North Tonawanda, New York.

COMPLIMENTS FOR LAWRENCE

Thanks for another grand issue of *Fantastic Novels*.

I believe I like this type of issue where two short but still complete novels are printed, more than the kind containing a long, drawn-out one such as the last issue.

Oh, don't get me wrong; I think "The Flying Legion" is a fine story. England writes very skillfully and beautifully. I thoroughly agree with a correspondent of mine who said, "The Flying Legion" is not only good, it is magnificent! Besides being an excellent writer, England

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must have had a phenomenal knowledge of Arabs and Mohammedanism to write such a story. If only Finlay had illustrated it. . . ."

The two stories in this issue were equally good. I just can't decide which is the best. Stories of early mankind have always intrigued me; so I thought "That Receding Brow" very good. Brand can write some very good fantasy. His "Devil Ritter" and maybe others have proved that. On the other hand, "The Man Who Mastered Time" truly approached that word on the cover, "classic" (which I agree with Paul Ganley is misused to a great extent). I had heard a lot about Cummings but never read one of his longer works. I was not disappointed. Oh, well, I guess I'll just have to depend upon the arguments advanced by the other readers to sway my decision of status to one or the other of the stories.

Bring back Lawrence, please. Nobody can hold a candle to him on the painting of covers except maybe Finlay or Bok. I didn't like Leydenfrost's illos. for "That Receding Brow", either. Finlay—need I comment on his illustrations?

Hey, Bruce Lane, stop hounding Finlay about his lurid cover girls (I don't think they're lurid).

Well, as the custom goes, I'll end with some recommendations for reprint which I wish you'd consider. How about something by O. A. Kline or R. E. Howard? I would also like to see "The Return Of She" in F.N.

TOM COVINGTON.

315 Dawson St.,
Wilmington, N. C.

P.S. I too would like to see the red strip restored to the lightning panel.

CALLING BUFFALO "FANS"

There really isn't much one can say on the latest F.N. Neither story was particularly bad, but neither was especially good, either. All in all, a rather mediocre issue far below the standard set by most earlier ones.

"That Receding Brow" was far and away the best, written as it was in Brand's easy, fluent style, which could make even a cook book interesting. This is perhaps a perfect example of good writing nearly ruined by a negligible plot. I think there should have been at least some semblance of a pseudo-scientific explanation for the metamorphosis occurring at the end of the tale. One cannot explain it on the basis of his weakness and fever since even acromegaly could not cause such a change in so short a time.

As for "The Man Who Mastered Time", it is a typical example of Cummings' quasi-scientific writing in which he produces a glibly told tale which succeeds in violating several of the basic laws of physics. I recall one tale by Cummings which violated two of Newton's three laws of motion, and not on a macrocosmic level. I sincerely hope this is the last Cummings to appear in your magazine for a long time hence.

The next issue appears much more promising. I have fond memories of North's "Three Against the Stars", and look forward to rereading it again.

I would like to urge that you reprint Francis Stevens' "The Nightmare" from the April 14, 1917 issue of *All-Story* as well as all available material by Austin Hall, Homer Eon Flint, Tod Robbins, Murray Leinster, and Arthur Leo Zagat from the pages of the old *Argosy* and *All-Story*. And if it could somehow be arranged I feel sure that all fans would enjoy seeing Stevens' "The Heads of Cerberus", as well as the tales by La Spina, Leinster, Robbins, and Quinn which appeared in the now exceedingly scarce *Thrill Book* in 1919.

Finally, I would like to again urge that all fantasy fiction enthusiasts living in Buffalo and the Niagara Frontier who would be interested in joining the Buffalo Fantasy League to please contact me by mail or call RI 6639 any evening.

ROGER G. KNUTH, secretary
Buffalo Fantasy League

37 Kenwood Road,
Kenmore 17, N. Y.

PROTEST

As a subscriber to *Fantastic Novels*, I protest. I had been hoping that F.F.M. and F.N. would continue to print the good and famous old stories that so many of us have missed. There are plenty of magazines devoted to the new science fiction and fantasy stories and more appearing all the time. Our only hope to read some of those wonderful old stories is through magazines like yours.

MRS. CHARLES E. SCHROCK.

4748 Drexel Blvd.,
Chicago,
Illinois.

Editor's Note: We shall have plenty of the older stories. There are some classics in the later yarns, however, which many readers have requested.

INVITATION TO FANS

I wrote to you a month or so ago when I received the November issue of F.N. from a U.S. friend; since when I have received the January 1950 issue.

I re-read "The Flying Legion," with nostalgic memories of my youth, but I fear that it did not come up to my memory which had probably gilded the story over the years. Even so, it was a good bit of writing and well worthy of inclusion in your magazine.

My chief reason for writing is to greet the first issue of a British edition of *Fantastic Novels*. It was a great surprise when I saw a copy of the November 1949 issue on the magazine stalls. It was identical with the US edition, probably photographically copied, but what rather surprised me was that the items on pages 3, 5, 7, 9, and 130 were different from those in the U.S. edition; not that that mattered, for they were either advertisements or fillers.

I am sure that the magazine's appearance in an English edition will do a lot to enhance its popularity here, and make many new readers. I do hope that it will be possible to continue it as a regular issue.

I invite any fans who might read this letter to write to me, or to the Secretary of the

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Science Fantasy Society, Frank R. Fears, at 6 Ferme Park Mansions, Ferme Park Road, London, N.8, for details of the Society.

Keep up the good work in future issues.

NORMAN ASHFIELD.

27 Woodland Road,
Thornton Heath,
Surrey,
England.

CLEVER STORY

First a comment on "That Receding Brow." A very clever story with, to me, a surprise ending. The way the story was constructed I expected Cory to be the "erect ape" and as such able to calm the orang.

The man who says "please no Tarzan stories" seems to be afraid of Tarzan.

"The Man Who Mastered Time" was good, but the synopsis in the front was misleading as they usually are.

DAVID TRAURO.

Box 1011,
Clovis, N. M.

ABOUT OUR ARTISTS

I have just completed your latest novel, "The Man Who Mastered Time" and am encouraged to write to your column. This story somehow held my interest throughout, although only about one-fifth of it contained any real adventure. Continuing to divide it into fifths, I would place three-fifths into the "only traveling through time" category. Though this latter seems a bit high, it is nevertheless true to some extent. The other fifth goes to fair character depicting and words that made sense. In summation, the story was easy reading and better stories have been written in F.N.

As for the second yarn, it was good, but the picture accompanying it was not at all drawn well.

With your permission, I would like to rate the artists in the order I think they should be; from best down to average. Virgil Finlay runs away from the field because he is original and excellent. Beating him would be like trying to rope a gazelle with a piece of string.

Runner-up honors go to Bok. Why? Because his drawings also stand out. In what way? Although his pictures are drawn like statues, and with little realism to them, they are still drawn masterfully. They seem to be done carefully and, like Finlay's, Bok's drawings unmistakably stand out.

Completing a trio of good artists, we have Cartier, who has the knack for drawing animals (don't laugh, yet) better than most artists. I'll grant you, Cartier draws human figures and still life with zest and zeal, but somehow he seems to have the touch that is needed for animals.

The rest are scattered below: Lawrence and Saunders should stick to drawing covers only. They excel in that department. Maybe it's because they try harder on the covers. Who knows? I hope *they* do.

Somebody in another mag. does outstanding work, and he is Astarita. Not well known, but good. Orban: ditto.

Again we turn to the ratings: This time ten is perfect. Finlay: 9.8; Bok: 9.2; Cartier: 9.1; Astarita and the cover trio rate about a 8.3; Orban (also better on the covers): 8.1. The rest, you need a magnifying glass your little hearts to be satisfied (?).

Yours for continued good publications,

FRANCIS M. MULFORD.

512 Linwood Ave.,
Buffalo 9, N. Y.

ENGLISH FRIEND

I have just read my first F.N., and although I've never written to a magazine before I had to this time to congratulate you on a really smashing issue.

I am a newcomer to the ranks of F.N. fans, but definitely *not* to the field of fantasy and science fiction, which I've been keenly reading for many years, so I should know a good yarn.

Meaning, of course, Charles B. Stilson's story, "Minos of Sardanes" which I thoroughly enjoyed right to the last word.

Now the hunt begins! I must find the first of the trilogy—"Polaris—of the Snows", or perish in the attempt!

Another "must" is the third story, yet to appear, "Polaris and the Goddess Glorian."

My second favourite in this issue is "The Living Portrait" by Tod Robbins. It's in the best fantastic tradition. "The Elf Trap" by Francis Stevens is not so hot—more hallucination than fantasy. Also, the story of Elmer Brown Mason's, "The White Gorilla" is not "true" fantasy—it's more of an adventure story.

Nevertheless the issue is a real "smasher". I'm going to keep my eyes wide open for any future issues of F.N.

Unfortunately the fantasy and science fiction field of literature in England is only in its infancy at present but is showing signs of developing into a fine healthy baby in the future. The literary output may be small but the enthusiasts are very many, truly fantastic!

I wish that some fans on your side of the Atlantic will find time to drop me a line.

Yours with fantastic hopes,

GERALD P. BURDON.

10 Crescent Road,
Worthing,
Sussex,
England.

A CORRECTION

This March cover of F.N. is good symbolism, but the faces seem but a copy of what Lawrence would do. I think we ought to have a few cover paintings with light backgrounds. Dark green or dark blue has become tiresome. I still would like the stripes returned to the borders of the yellow "lghtning flash" against which the title is set.

Leif D. Afen should be told that Dr. Whitehead never wrote a novel called "The Novel Pavane"; the story is "The Ravele Pavane". Funny, you missed this one mistake in selecting his letter.

It seems that Finlay has regained his old

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skill. He seems to have taken an interest in illustrating this novel.

Both stories were quite good.

The first trip into time and how it was described was a trifle depressing. The city grew monstrously, while our little human problems made no lasting impression. There is, as in many of these old stories, an underlying expectation, on the part of the author, of great scientific progress just around the corner. Like the "Frazia" plane. They haven't yet developed an economical helicopter and airplane combination. Although this novel is gripping enough, it is inescapably insipid in spots. I am driving at the impeccable kind of characters the heroes have. Take "Georgie" as an instance. He is a sort of "Rover Boy", or "Ben Webster". A sickening combination of iron jawed and emotionless "Scientist" and simpering "graceful poetic looking boy", quite emotional, "slight of build", yet a "real man".

Were there really such people around during the time of Cummings' writing this? If not, why did Cummings and all the rest of them idealize these striplings? Perhaps it was the influence of the Boy Scouts, or the Campfire Girls! Let us hope that none of the "Three Against the Stars" by Eric North is forever flushing, and being just generally, well. . . .

There were real men in "That Receding Brow"!

Once again I pray for a magazine with nothing but Munsey short stories, each month.

BOB BARNETT.

1107 Lyon,
Carthage, Mo.

Editor's note: The erroneous title was probably not Mr. Afen's mistake.

PAGING FLORIDA READERS

After finishing the March issue of F.N. I had to run around the house four times to let off some of the steam that had built up inside of me while reading "The Man Who Mastered Time".

As a whole, the story and plot were all right and there were just a few places that Mr. Cummings had the hero act a stupe. Here for instance is the worst blunder. Why, I would like to know, didn't Loto with the aid of his time machine go back a few years in time or just a few days and use the Thunderbolt on that deep dyed villain Toroh?

"That Receding Brow" by Max Brand was indeeed something different. The idea was a swell one and I feel that I can still say that Max Brand is one bang-up good author.

I wonder if any Stf fan with a wire recorder happened to get a recording of "The Outer Limits", a spacepic broadcast that came over the program "Escape", around the first of February.

How about a Murray Leinster story sometime soon because he is an author that really has got something, and as far as I know everyone likes him?

I have a request to ask of some of the fen who read this mag. Do you like to correspond with other fen? So do I, but you say "I don't have time to write more than one or two". Exactly the way I look at it, but if some of you would like to correspond with me by postcard which takes but a few secs. to write and there is enough room to say quite a bit, come on and try it.

I would like to hear from some of you Florida Fen.

CHARLES HEISNER.

Box 285
Lynn Haven, Fla.

SAUNDERS OKAY

F.N. cover came out quite well. The fans should like Mr. Saunders' work. . . . Finlay's are very nice and ditto Leydenfrost. Very pleased to have Cummings back. He's given our mags some of their best, and there are still good stories of his available from the files.

BEN INDICK.

208 E. Lane Ave.,
Columbus 10, Ohio.

HELP NEEDED

I hope that you will forgive the liberty I take in writing. A friend who has been in the States said you might be able to help me. I have a brother who was unfortunately crippled and completely paralyzed when his tank was blown up in the Norman landing so that he is unable to do anything but read now. As we have not much money, I wonder if I could ask you if any of your readers have any old fantasy fiction books or crime novels they do not want? I should be so grateful if anyone could help us. He broods such a lot, and it would take his mind off his condition. Thank you so much.

Your humble servant,
ALBERT H. SMITH.

Shirley Bungalow;
81 Gewison Lane,
Sewerby,
Nr. Bridlington,
E. Yorks,
England.

BACK ISSUE NEEDED

Back in 1929 or 1930 (It may have been earlier) I began a story in the old *Argosy* entitled "The Dwellers in the Mirage." I never got to finish the story. I'd read several of A. Merritt's stories in the *Argosy* and liked them very much; such as "The Snake Mother"; "The Face in the Abyss"; "The Conquest of the Moon Pool." So, I was anxious to finish "Dwellers." For twenty years—more or less—I've been looking for some magazine that would have it, but no luck. Then the other day I picked up the March issue of F.N. and found an old friend—Ray Cummings in "The Man who Mastered Time." After I finished that—I stayed up till two a.m. reading it—I began reading the letters to the Editor and found several references to the September issue of 1949 having that much hunted story in it—"The Dwellers in the Mirage"! Imagine my

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disgust in not having obtained that issue. So—I'm hoping against hope that you have a few extra issues lying around.

In case the publishers have none on hand, will some good-hearted fan of F.N. send me his copy as a loan? I promise to take good care of it and mail it back—so I can finish that story. What torture it is, to start a book and never get to finish it. Someone will add to my happiness by coming to my aid.

C. M. MOORHEAD.

Kellys Island, Ohio.

ONE OF THE GIRLS

I can't resist writing you once again after just finishing the letter section of the March issue of *Fantastic Novels*. I always read the letter section first and always enjoy it, and always have a great many comments, backtalk and enthusiastic agreements swarming through my mind when I finish; and always feel I, too, simply must sit down at my typewriter and have my say. But fortunately for you—for I'm sure you must always get much too many letters—I usually subside again without writing.

While I have enjoyed some stories better than others, I feel you have never really let me down. I am amused at the tone of weighty and olympic wisdom with which some of your younger readers criticize this and that yarn. And at the widely varying definitions of "fantasy" made. Fantasy is, to me, an all inclusive word—the supernatural, the practically impossible adventure, horror, science-fiction (the interplanetary part of which I easily get fed up on—in fact, the only kind of science fiction I care for really is that on the order of Taine or Stapledon, etc.)

Of all the stories you've published the only two I really didn't like are the Chesterton's "Thursday" novel, I've even forgotten the exact name— "The Man Who Was Thursday", I guess. And your last, "The Flying Legion". Exciting, sure. But Chesterton was very subtly putting over a great piece of illusionary, reactionary propaganda; and England's story, too, seemed to express much too much of personal and propagandaish bias. I am neither an anarchist nor a Moslem, but both those stories left me disgusted, with a bad taste in my mouth. I was surprised and disappointed with the England story. (Chesterton I knew of old.) Because one man is bored with life, having everything in a material way anyone could want, he is perfectly willing to sacrifice any number of lives of innocent people in a wild, cruel adventure.

The whole story is an affront to a great and brave people—even though they may have their cruelties, too. And I think anyone who has read Lawrence of Arabia's "Seven Pillars of Wisdom", as I have, would feel the same way. I hate any stories today that make villians out of a whole people.

Can I make an appeal for the one copy I'm missing? We were moving around and somehow I never got that one, and not having all my copies with me I'm not even sure of the exact date, or the title. But it was either the last of '41, I think, or the first of '42, and it was an Atlantis story. Can someone tell me? And sell me a copy? I'll pay any reasonable price, and return any postage expense incurred in writing me.

Congratulations on the past, and more of the same, for an indefinite future. I am saving my collection for my sons, and may they be reading your mag in another ten years!

MARION MCMUNN NILSON.

Mrs. C. N. Nilson,
Raderville Rt.,
Casper, Wyoming.

SUGGESTIONS

I finally staggered through the Ray Cummings opus and just had to write you a letter. For two years now you've given us *good* fantasy, and now to come up with something like this! This yarn, like the rest of his, should have been left in the files to moulder away. I hope that this satisfies those fans who have been asking for his work. If you never print another Cummings yarn it will be too soon.

The cover was not quite up to standard, but Saunders has possibilities. Finlay's interiors were just about the best he's done since the good old days. The letter column is up to your high standard and the short story is also probably good, although I haven't read it and probably won't.

I have been doing a little checking through the back ishes of F.N. to find out which stories and authors are wanted most by the readers. Stilson took first place easily as the wanted author, and his story "Polaris and the Goddess Glorian" also took first place as the most wanted one. You promised us this soon after you printed "Minos of Sardanes" but it will be at least four issues before it is printed, the way you have things set up now. That is nearly eight months of waiting, which I don't consider too soon. To get back to my checking. Kline was second and Flint third, and yet we have had neither of these authors in F.N. since its revival. Cummings was tied with Burroughs for fourth and fifth. England, Smith, Stevens, Farley, and Robbins round out the top ten. "Planet of Peril" and "Prince of Peril" took second and third respectively. Other stories high up there were "The Planeteer" —Flint, "After A Million Years" —Smith, "Treasures of Tantalus" —Smith, "King of Conserve Island" —Flint, "The Radio Menace" —Farley, and "Drink We Deep" —Zagat. I'd also like to add my pleas for, "Empire In the Air" —England, "The Phantom of the Rainbow" —LaMaster, "Beyond Thirty" —Burroughs, "The Labyrinth" —Stevens, "The Worm Ouroburos" —Eddison.

If you get a chance to print anything by Olaf Stapledon in F.N. or F.F.M. I would like to see "The Starmaker", "Last Men in London", "Last and First Men", and "Darkness and the Light". Stapledon's works seem especially

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WHAT DO YOU THINK?

hard to get and it would be wonderful to find them easily obtainable in either of your magazines.

There is not much else I can say about your swell mag except to keep it coming and to print it monthly if possible. Did you know that there are only three monthlies in the STF field? Two of them are unreadable. That's right. It would really be nice to have F.N. added to the monthly list.

Yours for better fantasy,
RICHARD ELSBERRY.

413 East 18th St.,
Minneapolis, Minn.

F. N. HIS FAVORITE

I had intended to hold this letter until after the appearance of the March F.N., but that mag is late, and I'd like to get the letter off to you. I think your two mags are the best reprint mags (and there are many!) on the market, and among the best of all current stfmags. I somehow prefer the ex-mag yarns in F.N. to the ex-book yarns in F.F.M.

Now to the real business of my missive:

Will anyone with the following mags please contact me and quote price and condition? I promise on my stfan honor to answer any and all letters about my want-list.

Wanted: F.N. issues number 1, 2, 3, 5 (pre-war ones); F.F.M., almost any issues before 1948; *Science Wonder Stories*, all except Oct. 1929, March and April 1930; *Air Wonder Stories*, any issues (my copies are in bad shape); *Amazing Stories;* I have a number of pre-1946 issues but are missing many more than I have. Please list all before '46 and I'll select from it; *Thrilling Wonder Stories:* Want many issues from 1936-1946; none afterward; *Startling Stories:* Number 2 up to 1946, many issues needed; *Wonder Stories:* Many issues 1930-36 wanted; *Marvel Science Stories:* any issues wanted; *Astounding:* almost all issues before 1947 wanted; *Fantastic Adventures:* all issues from the second to Dec. 1945 wanted; *Astonishing Stories:* all except April, 1943; *Unknown Worlds:* any issues wanted.

I hope for a good response for these. I am willing to pay reasonable prices, but nothing very high. I'm a sociable fellow and perhaps we can strike a bargain. I prefer mags in good to fine condition, but will accept anything which is not too soiled, and which has both covers more or less intact. I hope for long lists from you fans.

By the way, Miss Gnaedinger; has "Children of Tomorrow", a short novel by Arthur Leo Zagat from the June 17, 1939 Argosy ever been reprinted in F.N.? If it hasn't, and I don't recall it, consider this letter a recommendation of it. It's too bad that "Seven Out Of Time" by Zagat has been snapped up by a book-publisher, for it would have made a fine novel for F.N.

ROBERT SILVERBERG.

760 Montgomery St.,
Brooklyn 13, N.Y.

P.S.: The March F.N. arrived day after I wrote

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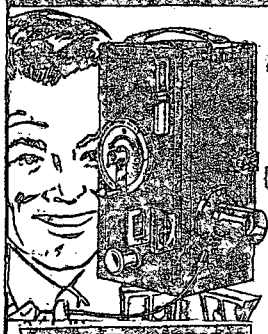

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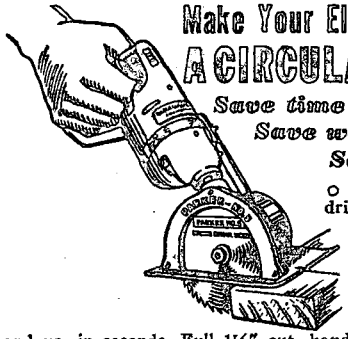

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the above. This Saunders is the greatest thing that's happened to F.N. since "The Second Deluge"! I like his colorful style and difference of arrangement. After a long stretch of Lawrence paintings, broken only twice by Finlay (or maybe thrice) some variety is refreshing. I seem to remember TMWMT being reprinted once in a Canadian stfmag. Has it ever appeared since its 1924 appearance in *Argosy-All-Story* Mag? Do we get others of the trilogy? I think "The Girl in the Golden Atom" appeared in one of the five pre-war F.N.'s, but it might be the "People of the Atom" I'm thinking of. The Finlay pics for the lead story were terrific.

Editors note: Zagat's stories have not appeared yet in F.N. but we expect to run them. As far as I know TMWMT has not appeared in magazine form since the original publication. We shall have more "Atom" stories if the readers want them.

WE COULDN'T BE BETTER!

I am now a regular subscriber to three of your mags—F.N., F.F.M., and S.S.S. In your March issue I read a letter from Ken Slater of England and so I am making this letter shorter than originally intended as I wish to make a similar offer to his.

Back issues of Stf mags are not to be had in India, nor can I send money to the U.S. for them. But if any of your readers get in touch with me, I'd gladly send them British fantasy books in exchange for back issues—the older the better. I'd send one book for four to six old mags, or be willing to accept a reasonable offer. I'd like to hear from readers first so as to avoid duplication or perhaps so many mags I couldn't cope with the returns.

Incidentally, I don't see any letters from readers in India. I'd like to hear from any of them.

Thanks a lot for the grand way you are keeping up the standard of your mags. They couldn't be better!

J. D. RUNDLETT (MR.)
Lauries Hotel
Agra,
U.P.
India.

CAN YOU HELP HER?

What joy it was to get hold of a *Fantastic Novels* issue containing the second story of the Polaris trilogy. Please, can you help me? I want the first one of the series, and the third one. Your fantasy stories are a real treat. I am getting older, but never too old to read fantastic, terror, horror, or weird stories. Yours are all out of the ordinary.

If any of the readers can help me find these magazines, I'll be everlastingly grateful.

MRS. CLARA MANSFIELD.
Houghton Road,
Thurnscoe,
Near Rotherham,
Yorkshire, England.

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WHAT DO YOU THINK?

TRADE OFFER

At last it is possible to obtain your very entertaining magazines, F.N. and F.F.M. In the last two years, I have bought a number of A. Merritt's stories. Of all the authors I think he is my favorite. There are no doubt a number of years in which I missed his stories, and I see advertised in your latest issue of F.F.M. the *A. Merritt's Fantasy Magazine*. Any hope of getting it either direct or indirect? I am willing to exchange any or all British issues of our only SF Mag.— *New Worlds*, and others.

The ads for *Super Science Magazine* rather tempt me, too. I have read two old copies, but none of the latest issues. For these I am willing to beg, borrow or buy or exchange.

In closing, keep up the good work of publishing such thrilling mags and you will be sure of one staunch fan in the Ole Country as long as F.N. and F.F.M. are available.

G. WALLER.

13 Frances Road,
Dartford,
Kent,
England.

COLLECTOR'S ITEM

I have a real collector's item. This is probably the rarest Stfantasy mag printed. "The Golden Fleece", '39. It was printed only in a limited edition and discontinued almost immediately. To make it even more desirable, it is autographed by Murray Leinster and Vic Rousseau.. It is in good condition.

I have another rare item. "The Moon Maid" by E. R. Burroughs. It is in fair condition. I am not sure, but I think it is a first edition.

I will accept the best offer for either or both. I want, if offer is books, Skylark series, by EE. Smith or, if mags, any *Capt. Tut, Startling, Wonder*, before '45 except for Sept. '39, and Summer and Fall '45 of *Startling*, or money.

You have a good mag. Congratulations on the revivals F.N. and S.S.S.

When are you going to bring out *Astonishing* again?

CHARLES BAIRD.

161 Albemarle St.,
Springfield, Mass.

GRATITUDE

Before donning my horn-rimmed spectacles preparatory to delving into my private collection of all three of your superb fantasy magazines, I want to express my heartfelt gratitude for your issuing of *A. Merritt's Fantasy Magazine*. It is the third pearl in the beautifully artistic necklace you are fashioning. Let's hope its tales will all be oldies—a fragrance of past glory. I maintain that to enjoy the present you have to enjoy the past. They go hand in hand.

JOHN MAULE.

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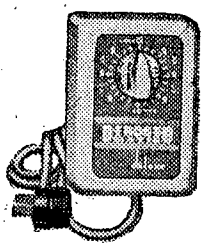

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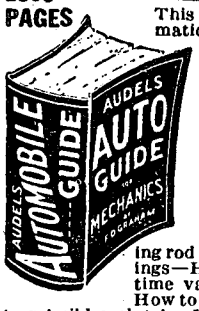

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I wish to express my appreciation for the fine selection you've given us in *F.F.M.*, *F.N.* Would like to read the following:

1. Anything by H. Rider Haggard.
2. Anything by John Taine, particularly "The White Lily".
3. "Palos of the Dog Star Pack" and "The Mouthpiece of Zitu."
4. Polaris and the Goddess Glorian."
5. "The Snake Mother" and "The Face in the Abyss".
6. "The Metal Monster."
7. "Burn, Witch Burn."
8. "The Fox Woman" and "The Black Wheel", as completed by Bok.
9. "The Blue Pagoda" by Merritt.

H. J. DESMOND.
528 Acacia Ave.,
Hawthorne, Calif.

RATINGS

I have been reading fantasy novels since 1939 and have never missed an issue. Here is my rating of the last year's issues for *F.F.M.* . . . 1. "Morning Star"; 2. "Ogden's Strange Story"; 3. "The Starkenden Quest"; 4: "Dian of the Lost Land"; 5: "Valley of Silent Men". For *F.N.* . . . 1. "Dwellers in the Mirage"; 2. "The Scarlet Plague"; 3. "The Flying Legion"; 4. "Minos of Sardanes". I also like all the Merritt fantasy so far. I have not liked "The Man Who Mastered Time" in the latest issue. I would like to sell three H. Rider Haggard books, "Cleopatra", "She", and "Allan Quatermain". Also Oct. 1940 F.F.M. with A. Merritt's "Face in the Abyss", and the May-June 1940 issue with "Sunken Cities". Also pocket book edition of "The Metal Monster." Anyone interested send stamped, self-addressed envelope.

JAMES J. ENRIGHT.
845 Columbus Ave.,
New York 25,
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FOR SALE

I like your magazines very much and wish you would print some of Burroughs' works.

I have several Burroughs books to sell—"The Mucker," "The Outlaw of Torn," "The Bandit of Hell's Bend," "Oakdale Affair and the Rider," "Jungle Girl", some Tarzans, etc., also "Frankenstein" by Shelley and "Donovan's Brain" by Siodmak.

Also have a few pocket books "The Green Man," "Out of the Silent Planet," "The Invisible Man," and "Avon Fantasy Reader No. 111." Please enclose postcard or stamped envelope with inquiries. Prices reasonable.

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You can see it too—how B. F. Goodrich tire cords are precision spaced in live rubber, with *no cross-threads!* Free to work together *in rythm* to give you the best tire value—"Rythm Ride"—*at no extra cost!*

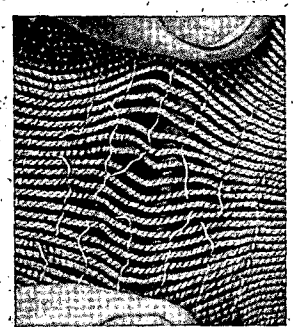
See your BFG dealer. Convenient terms, generous trade-in allowance.

RESEARCH KEEPS B.F.Goodrich FIRST IN RUBBER

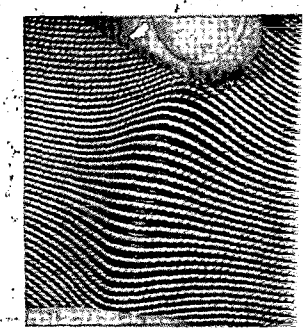
IF YOU CAN TELL WHICH MUSICIANS ARE BEST, YOU CAN TELL WHICH TIRE IS BEST:

1 In every tire thousands of cords flex as you ride. But in most tires, non-working cross-threads hamper the cord action. As a result, the cords are as *out of rythm* as the young musicians shown above.

2 There are *no cross-threads* in a B. F. Goodrich tire. Cords are free to work *in rythm* like the trained violinists above—free to pass impact from one to another, smother road shock, reduce wear, cushion bumps.



3 Most tire cords bunch and gap because of shackling cross-threads. Result: weak spots, "slacker cords", overworked cords. But BFG cords are sealed in rubber with uniform spacing and tension.



4 Only B. F. Goodrich has the equipment and skills to give you "rythmic-flexing cords" in every tire for every purpose. Buy today. See your B. F. Goodrich dealer. The B. F. Goodrich Company, Akron, O.

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